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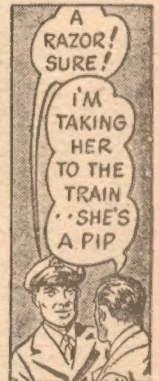
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OCTOBER
1946

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AND
COMPLETE



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Published bimonthly by Periodical House, Inc. A. A. Wyn, President. Office of publication, 29 Worthington Street, Springfield 3, Mass. Editorial and executive offices 67 West 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y. Entered as Second Class matter August 18, 1933, at Springfield, Mass. Copyright, 1946, Periodical House, Inc. Please send all subscriptions and correspondence relating to subscriptions to 67 West 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y. For advertising rates address Ace Fiction, 67 West 44th Street, New York 18, N. Y. Single copies 10 cents, yearly subscription 60 cents. While great care is exercised in the handling of manuscripts, this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety.

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CHAPTER I

ANGELA CLEMENT never would have looked up her old school chum, Nola Spain, if it hadn't been for the housing shortage. It hadn't occurred to Angela that if she wrote for reservations to the hotel in New York where she'd always stayed before, that there might not be a room waiting for her when she arrived. She'd only written a few days before, so, of course, there hadn't been time for the hotel to answer her. She discovered the sad fact that she was roomless at two o'clock in the morning.

The hotel clerk was regretful but firm. He suggested, "Maybe you have some friends with whom you could stay for a few days, Miss Clement?"

Derrick got very romantic. Angela let him put his hand over hers. She'd show Bill!



The only person Angela could think of was Bill Templeton. Bill was a newscaster at one of the big New York stations. He used to live in Vallejo, California, a long time ago when he was a boy.

Bill and Angela had kept up a spasmodic sort of correspondence. After all, Angela was in charge of a tiny independent station in Vallejo, herself. She was in radio so there was a bond between them.

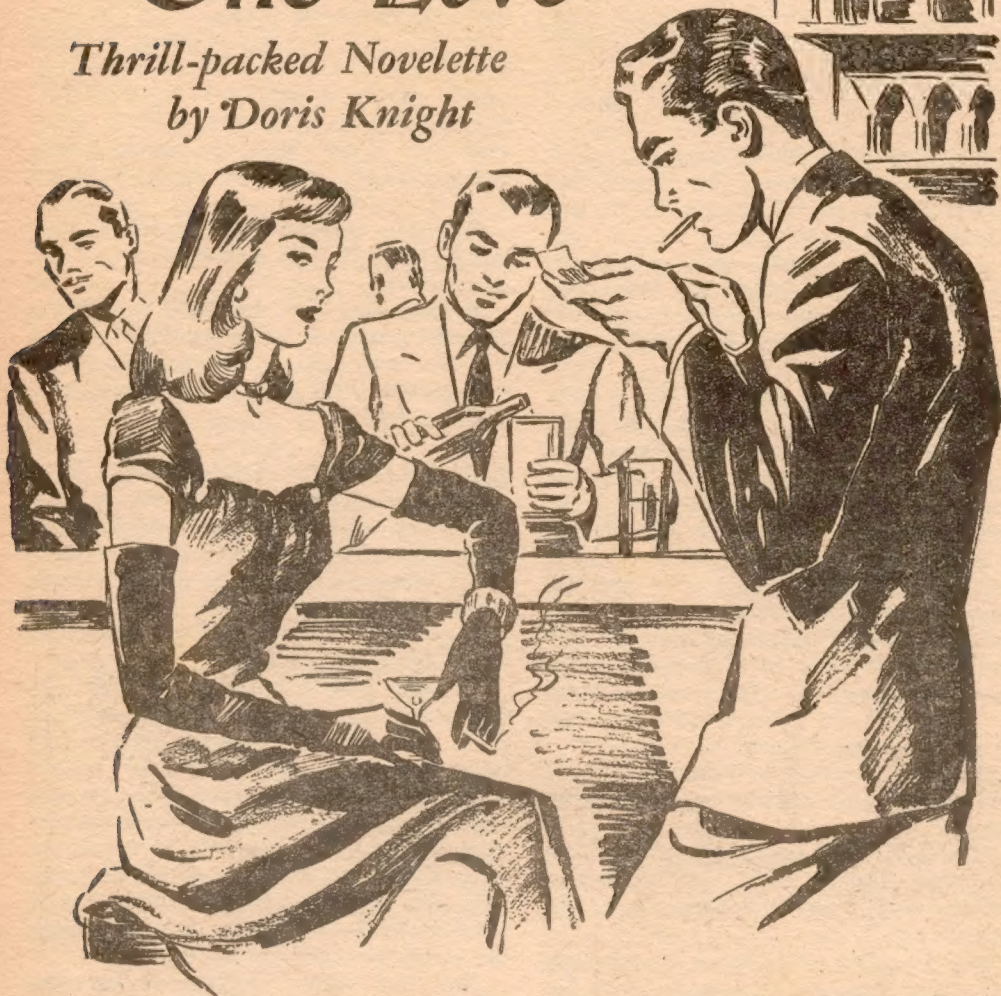
Angela wouldn't admit even to herself that the reason she had chosen crowded New York for her vacation, was because she wanted to see Bill Templeton again.

But, of course, she couldn't ring Bill Templeton in the middle of the night and ask him to help her find a place to stay!

*She Was a Small-town Girl Fighting for Her Love
Against a Sophisticated New York Smoothie*

More Than One Love

Thrill-packed Novelette
by Doris Knight



It was obvious Bill and Sari Sutton were having a fight. They were keeping it very quiet and restrained, but it was a battle royal just the same. And Bill was looking Angela's way!

She began to tell the hotel clerk she knew no one in New York. Then all at once she remembered the letter from Nola Spain.

Nola used to be a friend of Angela's, away back in the days before Angela's dad lost his money and Angela was a pupil at Miss Hodgkin's School in Hillsborough. Nola's name had been Nola March then, but she had run off with a man named Peyton Spain and had mar-

ried him. She'd been only sixteen then, two years older than Angela. Angela had been terribly thrilled over the romance of it all.

That had been seven years ago. Nola was twenty-three now. Angela was twenty-one. Nola had written that she happened to catch a broadcast Angela had put on wax for her little station. The transcription had been played on a New York station, and Nola had heard it,

so she'd written Angela in care of the station. The letter had been forwarded about and had finally reached her just as she'd started out for New York.

The closing lines, written in Nola's big, dashing hand were:

And so, darling, if ever you come to New York, look me up. I'm crazy to talk to somebody out of the past.

Lots of love,

Nola

Everybody said, "Look me up if you're in New York sometime." But they didn't expect you to do it! Especially at two o'clock in the morning!

Angela made one last attempt. "Couldn't you recommend any hotel that might have a room—just for tonight?"

The clerk just shook his head firmly. "Sorry."

So Angela found the telephone booths and looked up Nola's telephone number. She dialed with a tremulous forefinger, feeling perfectly awful. Nola probably would tell her to go jump in a lake. Nola would be asleep and quite rightly furious at being awakened. Nola would—

The telephone bell had been ringing monotonously. Now someone said, "Hello," in a very wide-awake voice. Angela heard sounds of a radio playing dance music and people laughing and talking.

"A party," she thought with a surge of thankfulness. "Saved by a party!"

"I want to speak to Nola Spain," she said breathlessly. "This is Angela Clement—"

"Darling!" interrupted the voice. "But, of course! This is Nola. How wonderful you're here! I wrote you only a couple of days ago."

The thought slid through Angela's mind that time didn't seem to exist for Nola. She'd written that letter at least three weeks before. But, wisely, she didn't debate the point. She said, "I'm in an awful jam, Nola. I made reservations at the hotel where I always stop in New York, and they haven't any room for me. I—I don't know where to go. I thought I'd ask your advice." Her voice trailed off. She simply couldn't make herself ask Nola to be her hostess for the night.

There was an odd little pause. Angela could almost hear the indecision. Then abruptly Nola said, "Darling, but of course, you must stay with us. We have

simply loads of room. Absolutely scads. We live in the Village you know, one of those places Aaron Burr lived in. Or was it George Washington? I never can remember. Anyhow, this is the address." She reeled it off. Angela paid no attention. She had it, anyway. Nola had put the address on the letter.

It was odd, but all at once, Angela didn't feel like going to visit her old school chum. Instead of being relieved, she wanted to say, "Sorry, to have bothered you at all, Nola. But here comes the hotel clerk to tell me they've found a room."

Someone was coming. It wasn't the hotel clerk. It was a gentleman intent on a pickup.

Angela said, "I'll be right out, Nola. Thanks a million." She grabbed up her suitcase and hatbox, staggered out of the hotel's side door with them, and hailed a taxi.

ON THE way to Nola's, Angela tried to sort out her ideas. It was a hard job. She'd been overawed by Nola when they were girls. Nola had been so blond and blue-eyed and popular with the boys. Nola had had money, too. But now she thought back, Angela realized that she'd never liked Nola much.

It didn't look to Angela as if Nola still had money when the taxi stopped in front of a row of old-fashioned houses, set back from the street. All the houses looked slightly sway-backed with age, and they had iron grillwork balconies on the second story. In front of each was a wide stretch of lawn, a dilapidated fountain, and some flowers that looked as if growing and blossoming in a city took too much strength for them.

The taxi driver understood her momentary hesitation. "Don't look like much, do they, miss? But don't let that throw you. They rent for about a hundred fifty dollars an apartment. They're historical, see? Me? I wouldn't live in one of 'em as a gracious gift, but people like artists and writers fall all over themselves to live there."

He added, feeling sorry for her because she was so obviously scared, "Would you like me to carry in your suitcase?"

"Oh, yes! Thank you," said Angela. A sudden, horrible thought had come to her. Maybe Nola had moved! Angela

hadn't taken down the address Nola had given. She hadn't even listened, taking it for granted it would be the same as the one on the letter, and she hadn't noticed the address in the telephone book.

But over the phone, Nola had spoken over the noise of a party. And now the whole house was shrouded in darkness.

Angela thought, "I'm a dope! Why didn't I listen to what Nola was saying? Why did I get the run-away-in-the-opposite-direction jitters just at that point? I deserve to sleep in the park for this. I certainly do."

They'd walked along the graveled path with the neat little brick border and had reached the low porch. The taxi driver rang the bell briskly.

Immediately a light went on, a door opened, and Nola was standing in the doorway, beaming a welcome.

Angela simply gasped.

She had remembered Nola as a very pretty girl, but nothing like this radiant beauty who stood there wearing a plain dark blue tailored bathrobe. Nola was cover-girl beautiful now.

"Darling!" she cried, and hugged Angela.

A man came forward and took Angela's suitcase and hatbox from the cab-driver and paid him off. From the taxi driver's, "Thank you, sir!" Angela guessed that he'd been overtipped.

Nola said, "Come in, my dear. We're so glad to see you!"

Angela didn't want to go inside.

It was the craziest thing. She had the impulse to go dashing after the taxi yelling, "Hey, don't go. Wait for me!"

She fought down the silly foreboding and docilely followed Nola into the house.

THE apartment smelled slightly musty, the way old-time ground-floor apartments sometimes do. The hall was done in old ivory, and there were beautiful old-fashioned mahogany chairs and a coat tree.

Nola, her arm around Angela, was chatting gaily. "We have all three apartments in this old mansion, which means this whole house is ours. Peyton simply can't stand being fenced in. Can you, Peyton darling?"

Angela thought, "At a hundred fifty dollars an apartment, that makes four hundred fifty dollars a month for this

place. What an awful waste of money!"

She was being taken into the huge front room which stretched almost the length of the house. She had to admit the room was beautiful and very tastefully furnished.

For the first time she had a good look at Peyton Spain, and instinctively she thought, "Oh, what a man! Wowie!"

Peyton Spain was handsome.

He was tall, broad-shouldered, filled with charm. Perhaps he was a trifle heavy from lack of exercise, but he was so tall, you didn't notice. He had abundant red-brown hair and huge gray eyes, and his face was lean, despite his weight. His mouth was thrilling.

Angela could understand why Nola had eloped with him seven years before.

She was very much aware of his charm and was slightly confused and embarrassed by it.

Still confused after she'd acknowledged Peyton's greeting and been welcomed by him, she said, "I hope I didn't break up the party."

Nola and Peyton exchanged a sudden swift look. "Party?" echoed Nola. "Why, darling, we weren't having a party."

"But—but I heard people talking and music—over the phone," Angela said.

Peyton's laughter boomed out. "Oh, that!" he said. "Just the radio, my dear—a late program."

Angela didn't say anything. She let them take her up the rather rickety stairs to the second floor. They led her into a cosy little bedroom overlooking the rear garden. She was thinking, "I run a radio station. I know radio through and through. You can't fool me. They were having a party, and it was going strong. And somehow they got rid of all the guests and cleared things up before I got here. Why?"

After Nola and Peyton had left Angela and she was in bed, that question dinged at her. "Why?"

CHAPTER II

NOLA asked Angela a great many questions next day. Peyton called it Old Home Week and grinned and went off and left them to it. But it seemed to Angela that Nola was specially interested in the romances in her life. Nola asked over and over if there wasn't somebody Angela was crazy about, someone

she'd come to New York to visit. Angela told her there was nobody, and that seemed to please Nola very much. Something warned Angela not to mention Bill Templeton.

Nola asked Angela to stay for the whole two weeks of her visit in New York.

Angela gasped, "Oh, I couldn't!" But she wondered as she protested where she could go.

Maybe Bill Templeton could help her find a place to stay.

She asked him that question when she had lunch with him that same day. Still obeying some strange impulse toward secrecy, Angela had told Nola that she wanted to visit some of the big radio networks that day, and about eleven-thirty she went out. She phoned Bill from the drugstore at the corner. He'd been gratifyingly cordial and had insisted she lunch with him.

When she arrived at the restaurant he'd told her to meet him at, he kissed her, and Angela had to tell herself very firmly that men in the New York radio world probably kissed everybody they knew, and it didn't mean a thing. Otherwise, her silly heart would have gone on doing loop-the-loops indefinitely.

Bill hadn't changed much from the way he'd looked when he was a little boy, the same straw-colored hair and laughing mouth and puzzled blue eyes and stubborn chin. Bill was tall and dressed wonderfully and was dynamic. But she caught herself contrasting him with Peyton Spain—a little to Bill's detriment, which horrified her.

"Hotels, apartments, rooms? Darling, do you think I'm a magician! If you've got a roof over your head, dig your heels in and stay. And give thanks on your knees you've found a foxhole to dig into. What's the matter with the setup anyhow? Cockroaches? Lumpy mattress?"

Angela laughed. "None of those drawbacks. It's perfect, really. Only—" She hesitated.

"Only what?" Bill demanded.

She laughed again embarrassedly. "I don't know. It's just a—a feeling I have. You see, I don't know Nola well. I met her at school ages ago. And I hate to be—obligated."

He said, "That's nonsense. If they've got a maid, you're not making extra work. And you can give her a nice pres-

ent when you leave and ask her to visit you sometime!" He grinned.

"The maid is a man," chuckled Angela. "He looks like a prize fighter, and he has one ear flattened till it makes him look lopsided, but he brought in the breakfast as daintily as any waitress. It was a good breakfast, too, and—What's the matter, Bill? You look so funny!" She frowned at him in bewilderment.

"Funny-humorous, or funny-peculiar?" evaded Bill.

She had the feeling he was just sparing for time.

She retorted "Funny-peculiar, and—"

He interrupted, "Just where did you say these friends of yours live?"

She told him, and he jotted it down carefully on the edge of an old envelope he'd pulled out of his pocket.

"Do you know Nola and Peyton?" demanded Angela. "Is that why you're acting so odd about this whole thing?"

He shook his head. "No. As far as I know, your pals aren't included in my circle of friends. Or enemies! But I do know a man called Dealer Dan who looks like a prize fighter and has one flattened ear and acts as a butler for—"

Right then things took a turn for the worse.

A gorgeous girl sailed in, smelling of exotic perfume and looking like something escaped from a top-flight fashion magazine.

Angela recognized her from her pictures. She was Sari Sutton, the new radio singing sensation. She exclaimed, "Why, Bill darling! How perfectly marvelous to run into you like this. Such a surprise!"

Angela thought coldly, "I'll bet!" She was discovering she didn't like Sari one little bit.

Angela liked her even less when Sari casually scooped Angela's gloves and purse from the empty chair and handed them to Angela and sat down there next to Bill, so close her arm brushed his.

Sari took over right away. She wasn't subtle about it. "Bill and I are engaged. Or hadn't you heard?" She showed Angela her huge diamond engagement ring.

Something went out of the beauty of the summer's day.

All at once Angela felt sort of empty. She said as quietly as she could, "No. I'm afraid I haven't given Bill much

of a chance to talk. I've been monopolizing the conversation up to now."

Sari showed she knew all about Angela. "Of course. Home town stuff." She turned to Bill with a little intimate gesture as if begging him not to be cross. "Darling, are the results of the first race at Santa Anita in yet? I couldn't help betting on that horse with the fascinating name, Quicksands. Don't you love it?"

Bill said, "You'd bet on anything, wouldn't you, Sari? You're a gambler from way back." He was watching Angela with an intent expression on his handsome face.

She thought, "Is my heart showing? Does he guess I've been in love with him from way back?" She felt perfectly awful.

Sari chattered on about horse racing.

Angela didn't listen. Everything was in a sort of haze of misery so far as she was concerned. She smiled and smiled till her face hurt, and all the time the pain in her heart grew worse. She fought to act natural and pretend everything was all right. All she wanted to do, was to get away by herself and mourn for something she'd never had—Bill's love.

It was hard to get away from Bill and Sari. They both insisted that she come up and sit in on a rehearsal. She couldn't think fast enough to make an excuse and get away, so she went with them.

SARI sang beautifully, and Angela had to admit she was good. Every once in a while Angela caught Bill looking at her oddly, as if he wanted to tell her something.

She thought frantically, "Does he know I'm in love with him? I mustn't make a fool of myself."

Bill fixed things so she could meet some big shots in radio. If it had been any other time, she'd have been thrilled. But all she could think about, was the fact that Bill was going to marry a glamour girl.

As soon as she could, she got away.

The wave of humid air which struck her when she came out of the big air-conditioned building, made her feel ill, so she decided to go to an air-conditioned movie.

The picture was a romantic tragedy, and Angela found herself crying over the predicament of the sweethearts. Or

was she crying because Bill was lost to her forever? She thought, "Well, what did you expect, sap? That Bill would fall for a little country mouse like you? Idiot! He was nice to you every time you came to New York merely because you were the girl from home. Nothing more. Those notes he wrote you were simply a friendly gesture."

She went to the dressing room downstairs and washed her eyes in cold water and made-up carefully. This time when she went out, the heat of the day was spent.

Riding to Nola's in a taxi, she thought, "This trip has been a jinx. I'll leave as soon as I can get a reservation on the train."

Nola seemed awfully glad to see her. She hurried Angela upstairs. "We're giving a party for you, darling," she said in a rush. "I've laid out a dress for you to wear."

Angela said stiffly, "I brought a black evening dress."

What did Nola think she was? A charity child!

Nola said placatingly, "Darling, I know. I snooped in your things. Awful of me, wasn't it? But, dear, the dress I want you to wear is dreamlike. It's your type, and you'll adore it!"

Angela did. That was the trouble. It was a fluffy white dress with tiny golden horseshoes applied all over. It was an off-the-shoulder dress, and it looked old-fashioned and quaint and seemed to match the house. Angela looked absolutely dreamy in the dress.

While Angela was admiring her reflection in front of the mirror, Nola heard Peyton outside the bedroom. She hurried out, not quite closing the door behind her.

Peyton said, "I've located him. The Palace! He looks as if he's going to be there for a long time. We—"

Nola said something to Peyton, and he shut up. Angela was only mildly curious. She was too busy admiring herself in that white dress.

A few minutes later Nola came with an evening bag and a three-quarter length black velvet evening jacket. "Slip this on, darling," she said, and helped Angela into the jacket.

"Oh, you do look so perfect in that stand-up collar!" Nola exclaimed as she looked Angela over. "Darling, would you

do us a big favor? Peyton turned his ankle, and I have so terribly much to do—the party, you know. Would you take this note to a man named Derrick Forsythe? He's at the bar in the Palace Hotel."

Before Angela could say anything, Nola rattled on, "You can't miss him. He's got a terribly young face and white hair. He's prematurely gray. And he has a small scar on his chin."

Angela repeated in a startled tone, "Derrick Forsythe, the millionaire playboy. Is that the one you mean?"

Nora asked swiftly, "Do you know Derrick Forsythe?"

"Of course not," Angela replied. "Only—well, everybody knows about Derrick Forsythe, and I—"

Peyton came limping in. "Don't make the gal do the little errand if she doesn't want to," he said easily.

His eyes lighted up. "In that dress you're a glimpse of paradise, Angela. You're a dream walking! After all, maybe you should go to the Palace so you can be seen by more people than just those at our little party tonight."

He was gazing at her with such obvious admiration that Nola became fidgety and seemed annoyed. That settled things for Angela. The last thing she wanted, was for Nola to become jealous of her.

"I'll take the note to the gentleman in the bar," Angela said airily, and held out her hand.

The note was sealed. She took it and put it in the evening bag Nola had brought in with the coat.

She wouldn't admit even to herself that one of the reasons she was going was because the Palace Hotel was Bill Templeton's favorite haunt. They'd often gone there for cocktails in the past.

If Bill saw her all dressed up and looking so beautiful—

She shut off her thoughts swiftly, conscious that she was blushing.

ON THE way to the Palace Hotel in the taxi two things stood out in her mind—the fact that Peyton had gone dashing down to the corner to hail a taxi for her—and hadn't limped at all. And the other was the glance she had caught Nola and Peyton exchanging—a very knowing glance.

She thought, "Peyton's ankle wasn't

twisted. This was all a put-up job. I suppose they're trying to promote some sort of romance between me and this rich playboy. They don't know my heart is dead."

The trouble was, her heart wasn't dead.

When she went hesitantly into the Palace Hotel, feeling terribly conspicuous, all dressed up and without an escort, the first person she saw was Bill.

He was all alone and was glaring into his drink as if it contained poison. He saw her almost immediately. He came over to her and caught both her hands in his. His face lighted up happily. "Angel! How wonderful! I was thinking about you, and all of a sudden I look up—and there you are!"

Angela told herself, "Stop trembling, you dope! He's engaged to another woman. He has another love. Remember?"

He hurried her across the room to the bar, and they sat down. He ordered her favorite drink. He was wonderful.

He said, "If you hadn't come to New York, Angela, I was going to California to see you. All of a sudden I awakened to the fact that I—" His voice trailed off.

It wasn't the cocktail that was bringing a sparkle to her eyes and a glow to her cheeks.

"I'm in love with you, Angela!" He flung the words at her like an accusation. "I found that out this noon when you looked so sunk when Sari came along."

"Oh!" Angela had forgotten Sari for the moment. "Oh, yes, Sari." She tried to keep her tone even and failed. "You—you can't be in love with two girls. Or can you, Bill?"

He said, "I'm in love with one girl, period. You, Angel. It's taken me ages to find it out. But now I do know—"

Again he stopped.

This time it was because right on cue there was Sari. She said loudly, "Bill darling!"

Bill muttered something and then said in a swift undertone, "Meet me tomorrow here for lunch at one, Angel. I can't have Sari going all temperamental on me here!"

Angela took a nose dive from the clouds to earth so fast her head spun. How could she, a small-town girl, compete with that New York smoothie?

Bill had said he loved her, Angela. He'd said it twice. And then just because Sari Sutton came along, he gave Angela a public brush-off. The—the wolf! He wanted to have his cake and eat it, too. He thought he could keep two girls dangling at once, did he? He'd soon see how far he'd get with more than one love. If he wasn't careful he'd end up with none.

In a fury, she looked around. Then she saw him—the bored-looking young man with the abundant white hair and the scar on his chin. Derrick Forsythe.

She went over to him. She put on a good act for Bill's benefit. She called Derrick by his first name and acted as if they were old friends. She'd never have dared if it hadn't been for Bill. She was furious enough with Bill to do anything and get away with it.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that Bill was taking it all in and not liking it a bit, either.

Derrick was a trifle tight. But his eyes were warmly admiring. "Sorry. Can't place the name. But hope I'll see the face again," he murmured. "You're very gorgeous, beautiful, in an unsophisticated way. I go for girls who have that dewy, fresh look in their eyes."

He bought Angela a drink. Derrick got very friendly with her, even romantic. Angela let him put his hand over hers. She'd show Bill!

Every once in a while she looked over toward the bar. It was obvious Bill and Sari Sutton were having a fight. They were keeping it very quiet and restrained, but it was a battle royal just the same. And Bill was looking Angela's way!

FINALLY Sari stalked out like a tragedy queen. Bill came purposefully over to Derrick and Angela. Angela's heart sang, but she thought, "I'll make Bill suffer a little before I forgive him. He can't be engaged to Sari and in love with me at one and the same time."

Bill said sharply, "Come on, Angel. We're getting out of here."

"Angel," murmured Derrick dreamily. "The perfect name for the perfect girl."

Angela, enjoying herself, said, "Bill, this is—"

Bill interrupted rudely, "I know Derrick Forsythe. Come on, Angel. We're

going to get out of here right now."

Angela began to rise, but Derrick tightened his hold on her hand. "You're my girl for tonight," he said with drunken solemnity. "Wherever you go, I'll go. Wherever you stay, I'll stay."

Bill glared at Angela. "Come along!" he snapped.

Angela picked up her evening wrap and bag and said to Derrick softly, "Sorry. I simply have to go with this caveman." All of a sudden she remembered the note in her bag which Nola had given her to hand to Derrick. She burrowed around and produced it and gave it to Derrick, with Bill watching her, his eyes smouldering.

Derrick read the note and crumpled it in his hand. "Sure," he said. "Sure thing, doll. I'll be there."

Bill hurried her out of the hotel.

He snapped, "What was that all about? What connection have you with the most notorious playboy in all Manhattan?"

Angela had been on the point of telling him everything. Now her temper flared to match his own. "I don't see that what I do is any concern of yours. If you can be engaged to a—a glamorous girl and yet tell another girl you love her, I don't think you're entitled to criticize anybody else!"

He snapped, "I'm not at liberty to explain just now."

"Neither am I at liberty to explain how I happened to know Derrick Forsythe!" she yelled right back at him.

He looked at his watch. "Good night! I've only got ten minutes to make my broadcast." He grabbed a taxi and called over his shoulder, "Don't go back to that Eleventh Street setup! I'll meet you back here in half an hour. Wait for me, darling." He slammed shut the taxi door. He was gone.

Angela stood there on the sidewalk, seething with rage.

She knew perfectly well that he had to dash off like that. Radio is split-second stuff. There are no excuses for being late for a broadcast. But why hadn't he taken her along with him?

Well, she knew the answer to that one, too.

Sari Sutton.

As she stood there, fuming, Derrick Forsythe came out. He linked his arm in hers chummily. He said, "Such a cute little come-on girl. Never saw a smoother

worker. Now don't look so worried, baby. I'm not mad. I'm just letting you know I'm hep to the score, so you won't think I'm a bird brain. I don't mind being taken, so long as I have a good run for my money."

Angela didn't pay much attention. So far as she was concerned she thought Derrick Forsythe's charms were greatly overrated. And nothing he said seemed to make sense.

But she did remember the fact that Nola and Peyton were giving a party in her honor. She'd forgotten all about it the minute she'd seen Bill.

Well, maybe a party would take her mind off Bill and what a complete and absolute heel he'd turned out to be. He thought he could have two loves, did he?

So she rode in a taxi with Derrick Forsythe to Nola and Peyton's place. Derrick tried to kiss her, but he was easy to manage. However, she was glad when they arrived at the house on Eleventh Street.

THE old house didn't seem somber and forbidding tonight. It wasn't dark yet, since it was only eight o'clock, but all the shades in the house were drawn, and lights gleamed out around the edges cheerily. Angela could hear people talking and laughing.

Derrick blinked. "Well, well! This is a different sort of setup." He sounded approving. "If this place isn't too big a gyp, it may run quite a while before Mr. John Q. Law catches up. Nobody would expect a respectable old house like this to be a—"

The taxi driver interrupted. "This is the address you asked for," he said.

Derrick paid the taxi driver and helped Angela out of the cab.

Angela said, "What were you talking about?"

But before he could reply, Nola was meeting them at the gate and introducing herself.

"So Nola didn't know Derrick Forsythe at all," thought Angela, and an odd little quiver went up and down her spine.

Nola wore blue, ice-blue, which made her look like a princess.

Derrick Forsythe approved of Nola. That was evident. He linked arms with Angela and Nola. "The two most beauti-

ful girls in the world," he murmured. "The lady in white, and the lady in blue!"

Inside the house, Angela gasped and looked around. A little party indeed!

Early as it was, fifty or sixty people milled around, eating at a buffet where tempting food was spread out and drinking at a portable bar at the far end of the drawing room. A four piece band was playing gay swing music.

But it wasn't all this which made Angela's eyes widen. Men dressed in knee breeches and George Washington coats and white wigs were taking her coat and saying, "Refreshments in the drawing room."

One of them was holding out his hand in a very insinuating manner. Nola snapped, "No, Watkins," and the man turned away hastily.

"What? No admission charge?" murmured Derrick, mockingly.

Nola stole a swift glance at Angela. "Oh, dear, no!" she said, and hurried them into the big drawing room, which looked almost small because it was so crowded with people.

Angela began to feel extremely uneasy. What was all this about?

Peyton, looking very handsome, indeed, was the perfect host.

Angela thought, "There's something wrong with all this. It's like a poorly rehearsed radio show. It just doesn't ring true!"

She shook off Derrick, who was getting a trifle too amorous. She went out into the hall. Nobody paid any attention to her. She stayed half-hidden behind a huge mahogany chest. And watched.

She wasn't quite sure what she was looking for, but presently some people, very dressed-up and eager-looking, arrived. They didn't ring the doorbell. They knocked in a peculiar sort of rhythm. That was odd in itself. But what was even more strange was the fact that the man gave a hundred dollar bill to the fellow in the George Washington costume. The other man paid a couple of fifties, too, in a casual manner.

Angela's heart began to thud. "This isn't a party for me, at all," she thought. "No. People pay to come here."

SHE got another shock a moment later. A man came in with a pretty girl with very hard-looking blue eyes who

was dressed in a filmy white dress exactly like Angela's—even to the little golden horseshoes. She wore a black coat, too, with a stand-up collar. It was a duplicate of the coat Nola had insisted Angela wear.

She didn't like any part of this.

Derrick Forsythe came out into the hall, making straight for her. It was obvious he'd had much too much to drink. "I been looking all over for you, beautiful!" he said thickly. "Got to take my little come-on girl along so she can get her cut of my winnings!" He chuckled.

Angela stood quite still. "Wait a minute, Derrick," she said quietly, trying to keep calm. "You've called me a come-on girl twice. What do you mean?"

He laughed uproariously as if that were a big joke. "As if you didn't know, baby! Why a come-on girl is a cute baby who picks up a rich guy in a bar and gets friendly with him and then tells him where there's a swell gambling set-up going strong."

Angela had to try twice before she said, "But—but I didn't tell you about any—any gambling—" Her voice trailed off.

He pulled the crumpled note she'd given him out of his pocket and handed it to her.

She read:

Best setup in town. No-limit games.

The address was engraved in the corner.

So that was it. Nola and Peyton ran a gambling place.

She might have guessed.

But why? Nola had been rich. Had Peyton run through all her money?

While these conjectures were cascading madly through her mind, Derrick was hurrying her toward the rear of the house. "Roulette's my game. I've got a system. It always works like a charm."

She hung back, and he urged her along. "What's the matter, baby? Got cold feet? I know. The heat's on gambling because that news commentator, Bill Templeton, is waging a one-man war. One of his buddies got taken for all he had, and the fellow bumped himself off, leaving a wife and two kids destitute, and Templeton's out for revenge. You're afraid the police will nab you for being

a come-on girl, aren't you? Well, don't you worry. I've got influence in this town. I'll protect you even if I have to marry you!"

It all fitted in beautifully now.

Bill had written her about the death of his pal and how he, Bill, followed every gambling lead he could get and turned his findings over to the police.

She hadn't paid much attention, thinking it had nothing to do with her. She'd never been interested in games of chance.

They had reached the back room.

Three big tables were thronged with people. Derrick made a place for Angela beside him and nonchalantly bought ten thousand dollars' worth of chips. Angela gasped. She hadn't realized that gambling went on in that scale.

The man with the flattened ear who acted as butler was at their table. Angela thought, "I told Bill about that man. What was it he called him? Dealer Dan?"

Derrick was placing his bets while Angela tried to sort out her frantic thoughts. She saw another girl in a fluffy white dress like hers. "Nola must dress all the come-on girls alike, so the dealers and croupiers can spot us, I suppose!"

AT FIRST Derrick won. Each time he did, he shoved some of the chips over to Angela. She thought he wanted her to keep them for him, and she arranged them in a neat little pile while she tried to think what to do.

Get out. That was it.

The best thing to do was to get away.

But she'd have to tell Nola about Bill. She owed Nola that, for taking her in. Or did she? Nola had dressed her up and sent her to pick up Derrick Forsythe and bring him to the gambling setup.

It had been a pretty low trick of Nola's.

Angela stole a glance at Derrick. His eyes had the glitter of a true gambler. He shoved big stacks of chips onto numbers and watched them being swept away.

Derrick was losing now, losing fast. He bought another ten thousand dollars' worth of chips.

She thought, "Well, he's rich and silly. He throws money away like water, so I guess it won't matter if he does lose."

But she felt guilty just the same, especially when Dealer Dan winked at her

as if she were scheming with him in this.

She tried to give Derrick back the stack of chips he'd handed her, but he snapped at her, "Put them in your bag. Don't bother me."

Angela thought, "This is where I exit quietly." Intending to return the chips to Derrick before she left, she went up the back stairs and sought her room.

As she went along the hall, every room she saw was filled with well-dressed men and women gambling like crazy.

She felt slightly sick. By not getting a hotel room, she certainly had walked into something! Well, the only thing to do was to get out fast.

The door to her room was locked.

CHAPTER III

SHE was rattling the knob and feeling very futile and angry about it all when Nola came along. Nola said quietly, "Come out on the balcony, Angela. I want to talk to you."

Angela went, feeling very sunk.

Nola sighed. The moon was coming up. It glinted on the blue of her dress. She was very beautiful.

She said, "Well, now you know, Angela."

Angela said, "When did you get the idea of using me, Nola?"

Nola didn't lie. "When I wrote you that letter, Angela. You see, Derrick goes for very unsophisticated girls. I have two come-on girls working for us, but they aren't his type. He wouldn't fall for them. I had to be very careful how Derrick was approached because Bill Templeton—that news commentator, you know—has been sticking closer to Derrick Forsythe than a brother."

"Why?" whispered Angela, her throat hurting.

"Oh, everybody knows that Derrick is crazy about gambling. Bill Templeton has been told there's a big-scale gambling setup going on somewhere in town. He's been trying to find out exactly where it's located. But Peyton and I have out-smarted him. Even if he was around when you gave Derrick that note, he wouldn't catch on because you're from out of town. You're not known." Nola laughed a little, pleased with herself.

Angela had to tell her. "Bill Templeton knows now." Her voice wasn't steady. "I—I know Bill. I've known him since

we were children. He's from Vallejo. I—I described Dealer Dan to him and—"

Nola was gripping Angela's arm so tightly that her wrist went numb. "What's that? You know Bill Templeton? You've tipped him off? Why, you dirty little rat! You—"

All of a sudden, her voice trailed off.

"I'm sorry, Angela. I had no right to say that to you. I had no business to rope you into this setup without your knowing what it was all about." Slowly her fingers released Angela's arm.

"It hasn't been easy to live outside the law, Angela. Try to understand."

Angela said, with a little catch in her voice, "What became of your fortune, Nola?"

Nola bit her lips. "My parents disowned me when I ran away with Peyton. He thought he was marrying a rich girl."

There was a tense little silence, then she said huskily, "Someday, Angela, you're going to know what it's like to love a man so much that he's your whole life, the end and aim of your existence, to love him so much that if he told you to jump off Brooklyn Bridge, you'd jump without question, to love him so devotedly that when he asked you to go in with him on a gambling setup, you'd be willing to cheat and lie and break the law to help him be happy and live in the luxury he wanted so much."

Angela said uncomfortably, "It's your life, Nola. I'm not criticizing. But—well, I'll just pack my clothes and get out of here quietly. I don't belong in this sort of a setup."

Nola looked at her. "Of course, if you feel you must go, all right," she said slowly. "But where can you spend the night, Angela? Couldn't you wait till morning?"

Angela shook her head. "Don't worry about me, Nola. I'd rather leave right now. I'll go to Grand Central Station and stay there till I can get a California-bound train."

Nola hesitated again. "Angela dear, there's just one more favor. Please don't tell Bill Templeton where this place is."

Angela flushed. "I told him where I was staying. I—I mentioned your names, Nola. I didn't think it mattered. I never dreamed—"

Nola said, "Wait right here, Angela. I'll have to go down and get the key to your room from Peyton. We lock all

the bedrooms when the gambling is going on. I'm sorry I got you into all this, Angela."

She did sound sorry. She patted Angela's hand and said, "Wait right here, darling. I'll try not to be long." Then she went inside.

ANGELA felt dizzy. She gripped the cool iron of the balcony railing and thought frantically, "Did Bill tell me he loved me just because he thought I was the way he could find out where Nola and Peyton had this gambling setup?"

She remembered something else. Bill had told her not to come back to Peyton and Nola's house.

She wished she'd obeyed him.

Somewhere near by a clock was striking the hour sonorously. She counted the strokes. Midnight. It didn't seem possible.

She thought, "It's taking Nola a long time to come back with the key to my bedroom."

She heard a car. "Some other poor fools arriving," she thought. Then she looked down. She gasped. Nola and Peyton and Dealer Dan were hurrying down the path toward a waiting taxi. They had four suitcases with them.

Surprise held Angela tongue-tied for a moment, then she called, "Nola!"

It seemed to her that Nola hesitated slightly, but Peyton hurried her on. They all got into the waiting taxi and drove off at top speed.

"Well," said Angela aloud. "Well!"

So Nola and Peyton and Dealer Dan had run away.

She hurried down the hall to her room and tugged at the door knob. It resisted stubbornly. She glared at the door. They built doors strong in the old days. There wasn't a chance of her breaking the lock.

Her thoughts raced on chaotically. "I haven't any money! I can't get my clothes out of that locked room. I must have some money even to pay for a taxi to Grand Central. I can't walk in these three-inch heels."

She was clutching her bag. When Nola had handed her the glittering bag, she'd taken it for granted there was money in it, but there'd only been seventy-five cents. Suddenly she remembered the chips. She thought, "That's it. I'll cash in these chips. I can return the money to Derrick Forsythe once I'm back home

in Vallejo. I can spend the night at Grand Central and then go out and buy some clothes."

Everybody seemed to be leaving. They were grumbling a lot about it, too. Angela realized that Nola and Peyton had stopped the play. But they were paying off. She was glad of that.

She hurried downstairs.

In the roulette room people were turning in chips similar to those in her bag. A keen-eyed man at a small table paid cash for the chips. With a fast-beating heart she joined the line. The keen-eyed man took the chips when it was her turn, but instead of giving her the money, he said casually, "You'll be credited with the amount," and went on paying off the others.

PRACTICALLY ill with disappointment, but still resolute in her determination to go, no matter if she had to walk, Angela turned away.

And almost ran into Bill Templeton!

It didn't matter to Angela that the glamorous Sari Sutton was clinging possessively to his arm. Angela's eyes misted with glad tears.

"Bill!" she gasped. "Oh, Bill, never was I so glad to see anybody in all my life. Get me out of here, Bill, please!"

Bill said, looking at her coldly, "What's this? Another act like the tall tale you put up to me about not knowing this was a gambling setup? I suppose you knew I was out after the gambling stuff hot and heavy in my radio broadcasts, and you wanted to find out if I had the low-down on your dear friends who run this charming little gold mine. Well, I do know now because you gave me the key to the situation when you described Dealer Dan with his flattened ear."

Sari put in sweetly, "I'm Bill's Girl Friday on this sort of stuff. Aren't I, Bill darling?" She squeezed his arm. "Bill knows I adore gambling, and I can simply smell out places where games of chance go on." She sighed a little. "So I tip Bill off. I'm simply invaluable to Bill."

Angela thought she had struck an all-time low. She was just no match for a New York smoothie. But there was worse to come.

Derrick Forsythe came over to her. Derrick was very tight and very furious.

"Dropped fifty thousand dollars! And then they stop the play and don't give me a chance to get even!" He caught Angela roughly by the arm. He snapped, "I don't mind your working as a come-on girl for a gambling joint. I don't mind being taken over the jumps by a come-on girl. But I'm no fool. That wheel is crooked, and I can prove it. As a matter of fact, that's what I'm going to do right now. I'm going to the police and sing like a canary about how I've been taken."

Angela gasped frightened, "I didn't—"

Derrick's fingers tightened. "I saw you give the wink to the croupier to set the gadget on the wheel, so I couldn't win. I'm taking you to jail with me, come-on girl. I don't mind losing, but a crooked wheel makes me see red."

Sari yawned charmingly. "Isn't this where we came in, Bill darling? I've put the finger on this charming little gambling setup. You can put it in your morning broadcast, which will automatically close the joint. Why hang around any longer? Surely you aren't going to believe any more fairy tales about your old school chum not being able to find a room and just happening to bunk with Nola Spain, are you? I told you in the Palace Hotel that the girl was a gold digging—"

Angela cried, "Bill, I didn't know—"

He flung at her, "You cashed in your cut from the evening's take. I saw you!" He was looking at her so angrily that she felt as if his glance burned her face.

Derrick said, "Such a pretty girl, so innocent-looking and sweet. Stop making my girl feel bad. Maybe I'll marry her!"

Sari laughed. "See? You don't have to worry about your old school chum, darling. She's about to land on her dear little educated feet—right in a middle of a pile of million dollar bills!"

Angela cried, "Bill, I didn't know anything about this gambling setup. I—"

Bill snapped, "I telephoned in a tip to the police. This place will be raided any moment. We'd all better get out, fast."

They weren't quick enough. Even as Bill spoke, a man's voice yelled, "Beat it everybody. The police!"

Lights blinked out so abruptly, everyone was static with surprise for a startled moment. Then the rush began.

Someone had his arm around her and

was hurrying her along. People were shoving and pushing and calling out to one another and bumping into other people in the darkness.

Angela thought it was Derrick Forsythe who was hurrying her along at such a frantic pace. Suddenly a flashlight shone from a policeman's hand, and she saw it was Bill who was with her.

After that not even the policeman could scare her. She clung to Bill with tense fingers.

Bill said, "I'm Bill Templeton, officer. I gave the tip-off for this raid."

The policeman kept the flashlight trained on them. His voice sounded uncertain. "I know, Mr. Templeton. I recognized you. But the young lady—" His voice trailed off.

Bill put in impatiently, "She's a friend of mine from California. I brought her here to see a raid take place."

The policeman still was unconvinced. "But, sir, she's wearing one of those dresses. The come-on girls working in this place all have them, white and fluffy, with little gold horseshoes all over. We already got one of the girls. Caught her sneaking out. She told us that the girls connected with the joint would wear the same sort of dress, so I'll have to arrest this young lady, I'm afraid."

Angela held her breath, waiting for Bill's answer.

"My friend was unfortunate enough to select a dress similar to those worn by the employees of this place," he returned suavely. "When I vouch for her, surely you can't doubt that she's in the clear, officer!"

The policeman said uncertainly, "I suppose not. Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Templeton." Then he snapped off the flashlight and went off down the hall.

Angela said in a rush, "Oh, Bill, I was such a chump! This dress does belong to Nola. She said my dress was too somber, and—"

Bill wasn't listening. He hurried her out of the house.

OUTSIDE, the moon was bright overhead. The night was warm and balmy. Angela looked back at the old house and shivered. She said, "My clothes and everything are back there, Bill. They're locked up in one of the bedrooms upstairs."

Bill said, "I'll have one of the officers

bring your stuff to you tomorrow. I'll explain everything. It'll be all right."

Angela took a deep breath and asked in a trembling voice, "Bill, did you just say you were in love with me because you wanted to find out if my friend—if Nola and Peyton were the gambling people you were after?"

She knew she ought not to ask that question. But she had to find out.

Bill snapped, "No. I meant every word I said."

"Then—then what about Sari Sutton?" Did he have more than one love? Was he a wolf?

"Sari?" His voice was very casual. "Oh, that. Sari needed a heart interest. Our engagement was mere publicity stuff cooked up by the radio station."

Angela thought, "Sari didn't take it so casually. She was crazy about you. She meant to hold you to the mock engagement."

But Angela didn't say that to Bill.

Angela murmured softly, "I didn't dream that Nola and Peyton were running a gambling house. When I rang up, I heard a party going on, but by the time I arrived, they had cleared everybody out, and it was quiet as could be." She drew a long breath. "I—I told Nola you probably were going to crack down on them. They—ran out on the set-up, before the police arrived." She felt she had to tell Bill the truth, even if he got furious at her.

He said, "It doesn't matter. Phonies and cheats like Nola and Peyton never come out on top in the long run. They may get away this time, but sooner or later things will catch up with them,

and they'll come to a nice sticky end."

Angela was tired and over-wrought. Suddenly she began to cry.

With a smothered exclamation, Bill caught her close in his arms and kissed her. All at once the rather dingy old street turned into a tropic garden filled with beautiful flowers and stately palm trees.

He kissed her again, and she felt as if she floated on a rosy cloud with moonbeams in her hair.

"Oh, Bill!" she whispered huskily. "Oh, darling."

"Bill said masterfully, "You've got to marry me, Angel! Know why? The housing shortage still is on. Remember? If you say yes, you can have my apartment to yourself till we can get the license and arrange for the wedding. I'll bunk with a pal of mine. But if you don't say yes, it'll be Grand Central Station for you, my proud beauty—and you in your come-on girl dress, too!"

She knew he wasn't as casual as he sounded. He was telling her he adored her and that marrying her was the end of the rainbow for him. But being Bill, he was saying it flippantly. His eyes told her the truth.

She said softly, "You've talked me right into marrying you, mister. Just to get a roof over my head!"

"Darling!" he said swiftly. "Oh, my darling!"

Bill's kiss was like zooming through space on a rocket-bomb. Bill's kiss was like coming home after being lost for a long time. Bill's kiss was filled with the sound of wedding bells and the perfume of orange blossoms.

Between them was the strongest of loves—and the strongest of barriers.
A powerful story you must not miss—

LOCKED-DOOR MARRIAGE

in the October issue of

SECRETS

on sale August 28th

The Flirt and the Heartbreaker

by Sheila Morris

HER girl friends were always saying to Binnie Carter, "Binnie, I don't see how you do it!" Some of them were even a little resentful or catty about it, which was really quite unreasonable. After all, Binnie had worked out her technique with men all by herself, and it would be ridiculous if everyone in her crowd used her line. She'd do almost anything in the world for her friends, but really, in the matter of men, she felt that it was every girl for herself.

The only person she ever meant to give her secret to was Maeve, her younger sister. Maeve was four years younger than Binnie, only fifteen. By the time Maeve was ready to know the secret, Binnie would probably already be safely married. She was in no hurry at the moment because life was so much fun. And with her technique, she reflected, she would have no trouble taking her pick of any number of men. She was an expert flirt and always got good results.

Maeve came into the room they shared to watch Binnie dress. She watched admiringly as Binnie went through the motions of getting glamorous.

Maeve said, her voice a little wistful, "Really, Binnie, a person would think you were Cleopatra or somebody, the dates and phone calls you have! But you don't look it. You aren't glamorous, really. You aren't even pretty."

"Thanks," Binnie said cynically. "It takes one's family to appreciate a girl properly."

"Oh, it isn't that I don't appreciate you!" Maeve protested in alarm. "It's just that I know I'm not glamorous myself, and I just keep thinking that if you can do so well, I can too!" She flushed, realizing that she'd made it even worse. She added lamely, "You're terribly cute, really. It's just that you don't look like —a Cleopatra."

Binnie took pity on Maeve. "Darling, I know it. I gave up trying to be glamor-

ous long ago and compromised on something better. And one of these days when you need it and I'm married off, I'll hand the technique down to you!"

Binnie's clear gray eyes were as candid as always as they looked in the mirror, appraising herself. She was too tiny to be devastating. Her face was elfin rather than exotic. Her thick copper-tinged blond hair was hard to manage at times. And her figure looked well only in things from the junior department and not in the slinky creations fatally glamorous girls were supposed to wear. But it didn't matter, not with Binnie's technique.

While she dressed, which didn't take long, she had three telephone calls from men who were madly in love with her. She was gay and soothing with them all and managed to leave them all happy.

Her date that night was Tommy Reynolds. When she swished downstairs in her white piqué formal, he looked at her with adoration mingled with worry, probably because he knew that he wouldn't last. None of her dates did.

Binnie hated hurting anyone when she broke off a romance, but it had to be done. She'd argued that all out with herself before. Getting hurt was a chance men took. They didn't worry about the girls getting hurt, did they? Most men were heartbreakers. Tommy Reynolds himself had badly cracked Felice Crane's heart only a month ago, just before he'd started giving Binnie a rush.

She was especially nice to Tommy that evening, preparing for the final breakup. But on the way to the dance, Tommy burst out, "Binnie, you've just got to marry me!"

Binnie told him gently what she'd told him from the very beginning, "Tommy darling, I couldn't. I suppose I could love you if I let myself. But I never will do



Whenever she looked up, Chase Morrow seemed to be staring disdainfully at her, telling her, "I see absolutely nothing in you, Binnie Carter. You won't disturb my life!"

that. I'm wiser than I look. I know it would never work out. I'd be bad for you in so many ways, and you have such a marvelous future ahead of you." She went on explaining to him why they wouldn't be happy together. She was firm, but sweet. It was her usual line, and Tommy was reaching to it in the usual way.

THEY were going to the country club, of course. Social life in Springhaven centered around the club. There was a dance every Saturday, and this one was special because it marked the end of the tennis matches.

But before it was over, it became very special to Binnie because her next man was there. She knew it the minute she saw him, which was during the first dance.

He was Chase Morrow. She recognized him at once. She'd seen his picture in the papers and heard about him ever since he'd moved to Springhaven. Everyone knew about Chase Morrow, the composer and concert pianist. All the girls had been talking about him recently. Only now the things they'd said began to make sense.

He was famous, but he liked to be



*She Had a Way with Men That Had Never Failed,
but When It Did —*

friends with everyone. Already, in spite of his fame, he was just one of the gang at the club. He had charm and personality and good looks, and his eyes were the kind a girl liked to look into. When Binnie went into the ballroom, her glance chanced to meet his.

It was arresting, that look he gave her, arresting and at the same time a kind of challenge. At just that moment Binnie's usual following of men had surrounded her. But Chase Morrow's eyes definitely made fun of her. It was practically insulting, that look, as if he were saying that she was awful to enchant so many men and that they were fools to be taken in by her flirtatious ways.

Binnie planned what she'd say to him when they danced. He'd undoubtedly ask her when they were introduced, which ought to happen at any minute.

But the evening wore on, and he didn't ask her to dance. And he deliberately avoided meeting her. Cissy Taylor's fiancé, Joe Bliss, was being too attentive to Binnie, so Cissy tried to introduce Chase Morrow to give Joe competition. But Chase shook his head, and across the room Binnie imagined she heard him say dryly, "No thanks, Cissy."

At first Binnie felt bewildered and helpless, which were completely new feelings for her. Then she reasoned with herself and realized that it was silly of her to let his indifference to her get her down. She was sure that if she had the chance, she could have Chase just as adoring as all the other men in her crowd.

Her technique had never failed yet, and Chase was a natural for it, really. Successful men like Chase always were.

The hours slipped away, however, and Binnie realized that Chase wasn't going to be introduced to her if he could help it, so she wouldn't have a chance to even try her usual routine. It was the first time such a thing had happened to her. And she wanted to see how successful she could be with him. She knew Chase Morrow was aware of her. Whenever she looked up, he seemed to be staring disdainfully at her and the men who surrounded her. He seemed to be telling her, "They're fools, but I'm not. I see absolutely nothing in you, Binnie Carter. You won't disturb my life!"

It was worse, really, than if he just hadn't noticed her. Every time she looked

at him, Binnie got more tense. Finally, when the dance was practically over, she took matters into her own hands. In this day and age, Binnie reflected, you had to look out for yourself.

WHEN Chase went into the big dining room where the buffet supper was arrayed, and went alone, Binnie excused herself and left her partner and followed Chase. She walked right up to him just as he was taking a large helping of scrambled eggs. With her foolproof technique, she'd never been afraid of any man in her life, but, ridiculously, Chase made her knees tremble.

Nevertheless she took a deep breath and said blithely, "Luckily, we don't bother with introduction here at the club, Mr. Morrow. In Springhaven everybody belongs to the club, and we want you to feel at home now that you've bought the Adams place. I'm Binnie Carter."

By that time Binnie had run out of breath, and besides her sudden anger made it impossible for her to talk. Chase Morrow was looking at her as if she annoyed him, as if she were intruding.

She controlled her annoyance, however, and plunged into her usual technique. She hoped she wasn't being too eager, but somehow she just couldn't wait any longer to put Chase Morrow in his place, to answer that undeniable challenge in his eyes, to deflate his superiority which seemed to indicate that he felt he was beyond the radius of her charms.

For the first time in her life, however, Binnie felt nervous as she went into the routine she knew couldn't fail. She tilted, "Even though we hadn't met, I wanted to tell you how wonderful I think your piano technique is and how delightful your compositions are."

Chase Morrow looked unimpressed. And then Binnie finished, "I thought I'd better tell you now because I imagine I won't have another chance to tell you."

For a moment she thought that he wasn't going to take the bait. The moment stretched into eons, and she wondered frantically how she could make a graceful exit. But then, of course, Chase Morrow proved that he was like all the other men she'd ever known. He took her bait.

"Why won't you have another chance?" he asked probingly. "Because you're so

popular that you won't have time for me?"

Binnie laughed with just the right degree of shy embarrassment. "I didn't mean that," she said, but her tone implied that she had meant exactly that.

Chase said curtly, "I imagine I'll be pretty busy myself."

For a moment Binnie detested him to the flaming point. No one had ever reacted quite so venomously. But that only showed, of course, that she was making progress. She looked up blandly, sweetly, as if she were just a little hurt. "Oh, I didn't mean that! Please don't think I did!" And then, as if alarm at hurting him had forced her to the point of confidence, she said gravely, "Frankly, Chase, I'd like to see a lot of you, to date you. But—I never could. I wouldn't even if you ever wanted me to. I'd be bad for you. I may be frivolous and flirtatious, but—I wouldn't want to hurt you because I—I think I could like you."

That took him off his guard, and from then on his reaction was just the same as the reactions of every man she'd ever met. He'd swallowed the bait, hook, line and sinker.

Pressing her advantage, she said gently, as if it really hurt her to say it, "I—I think we could like each other, Chase. But—I know myself too well."

Looking at him, Binnie knew Chase Morrow was no different from any other man, except, of course, that he was definitely more exciting and definitely more challenging. Her technique would work with him even better than usual because he was unusually independent. He didn't like being told something was bad for him. No man did. And especially Chase Morrow didn't like it.

She'd seen his exact expression on her small cousin Jimmy's face when he was told that too much jam was bad for him. It meant that at the first possible opportunity he was going to make a raid on the preserve cupboard.

For the hundredth time in her life, her spirits soared in the way it always did when she'd made another conquest. She knew the right moment for an exit, too. She smiled wistfully, gallantly, and said with finality, "It's been awfully nice meeting you, Mr. Morrow. I'll always remember it. I mean, your music is so wonderful." Actually, her eyes denied

that it was his music she'd been thrilled by.

"But I'll see you again, won't I?" Chase insisted, and by that time there was no doubt about her triumph.

She went on being wistfully regretful and just a shade noble, as if she certainly didn't intend to break up his life or inflict any injury on his heart. "I don't think so because—it wouldn't work out."

And then, with Chase still obviously wanting to pursue the conversation, she went back to the ballroom and the stag line.

EARLY the next morning the telephone rang. It was Chase. His voice, even though she'd heard it only once before, sent a strange warm recognition through her. Of course, she pretended she didn't know who he was. And then when he said, "This is Chase Morrow," she sounded startled, and then gave a regretful little gasp.

"Look," Chase said, not giving her a chance to argue. That was the standard approach, of course, but Chase did it even better than most men who'd rushed her. "I've been thinking about what you said last night, and—it really doesn't make sense. It—it just bewilders me. I don't get it, Binnie. At least you owe me an explanation. Frankly I can't see what possible harm it would do to me to date you." He sounded rueful. "After all, at twenty-six I'm well able to look after myself."

Binnie said undecidedly, "Well—"

She knew what would come next. It did. Half angrily, Chase demanded, "You at least owe me an explanation of why you'd be so detrimental to my well-being. I'm in the habit of making my own decisions."

"Really, Chase!" Binnie said in distress. "It's for your own good, really it is. I know we clicked. But—I also know myself."

Chase was adamant. "You've got to see me just once, Binnie, and give me a logical explanation. You owe me that, at least. And if you don't, I'll never stop telephoning you. I'll be the worst nuisance you ever knew."

Binnie pretended to think. And then she said, "All right, Chase. But—don't say I didn't warn you. And—maybe I can explain what I mean. Perhaps I

do owe you that. Besides, even if we can't be anything else, I want us to be friends."

THE next day she had lunch with him at the country club. Binnie knew she looked her best in a poppy-colored dress that played up her tan and her hair. And she was more excited over this date than she had been in years. That, of course, was because Chase had been more of a challenge.

The minute they met, she saw how intrigued he was and how defiant. He still had the expression little Jimmy had when he was told to keep out of the jam. She had to admit that Chase was utterly charming. He was by far the catch of the season. Probably every girl in town wanted to date him.

"I've got a very scientific, reasonable mind, even though I'm a musician," Chase began as soon as they were seated. "In fact, musicians have to be practical or they don't succeed. So don't pull any punches. Tell me why you think you wouldn't be good for me. Itemize the reasons why you think you'd break my heart. That's what you meant, wasn't it?"

"Oh, no!" Binnie protested quickly. "We—we clicked—I'll admit that. But—I know it wouldn't work for us to date. You're an artist. You have to have peace of mind, Chase. I respect your work and your career, and I think you're a very nice person, and what you need is a quiet, dependable type of girl."

She took a deep breath and plunged on, "Men don't like to be uncertain about a girl, especially men like you. And—I can't be pinned down. It—it's something I've fought for years, but it isn't my nature to be peaceful. It isn't that I'm fickle," she said appealingly. "It's just that I don't like being bossed, or belonging to anyone."

"And is that bad?" Chase asked, frowning.

"I—think it is," she said hesitantly. "You see, Chase, there—there was someone who loved me very much once. And—and though I cared for him in the beginning, I didn't want to be tied down, and—and everything cracked up for him because we broke up. He was a lot like you, Chase, so I'm sure I wouldn't be good for you. Your work demands peace of mind and happiness."

She finished with an air of finality. "You—you'd better know the worst. I'm a spoiled brat. Chase. I'm not domestic. I like to flirt. I like to do things on the spur of the moment, and I'm always late."

For a moment she was afraid maybe she hadn't gotten away with it after all. But she'd had several years of practice, and she knew just the tone to use, just the air of self-sacrifice and drama. Men were romantic, she'd learned long ago. A touch of pathos and sacrifice had them eating out of a girl's hand.

"Suppose I accept the risk?" Chase said. "You're a flirt—well, then I'll become a heartbreaker. Binnie, look at me!" he commanded. "We belong together, you and I. Don't spoil it."

"But," Binnie protested, "that's just what I've warned you about, Chase! Don't you see, there's a kind of—of jinx on me. It must be a jinx that makes me so restless, so—so unable to love one man for very long. I do hate it to hurt others, Chase, and it always does! I'm unhappy, too, but—that doesn't matter. I wouldn't want to hurt you, because you make so many people happy. And you're not the type to be a heartbreaker. You're too nice."

It was a very touching speech. The idea of the jinx was new and good. It was probably what cinched her success. She looked at him pleadingly, as if now that she'd warned him, he could proceed at his own risk because she didn't know how long she'd be noble.

She went home after finally agreeing to date Chase again. She'd made him work very hard for the date and pretended that she was only doing it out of uncontrollable emotion.

LATE that afternoon Maeve dragged herself into their room as if she were ninety instead of fifteen. She was flushed and untidy from her usual ferocious tennis game. Her face was tear-stained. There was something so pathetic about her that Binnie was worried. "Darling, what is it? You've been moping for days."

"It's a man," Maeve sobbed. "He's marvelous, and I'm not getting anywhere with him. Oh, Binnie, tell me what to do! You promised that someday you'd tell me your technique. I need help now desperately."

Binnie couldn't resist Maeve's appeal. After all, if you couldn't help your own sister, who could you help? It was all in the family. She said, "Cheer up, darling. I'll tell you how to get your man. But remember not to tell anyone else. I guess it won't hurt if we both use the same technique because our boy friends aren't in the same age group."

Maeve listened to her description of her technique intently, absorbedly. She got every detail down straight. After she'd washed the tears off her face, she looked almost hopeful, if a little grimly intent. "I'll never be able to thank you enough," she said. "And—and they could torture me before I'd reveal our secret! This man is so wonderful, Binnie. He's—"

Binnie pretended to listen, but actually her mind wasn't on Maeve's high school beau. She was remembering how much fun it had been to lunch with Chase. She hadn't had so much fun in years.

And though she had at least one date every day until she saw Chase for their date four days later, she felt somehow as if she were living in a kind of dream, that nothing was real. She didn't even get her usual thrill from being the most popular girl in Springhaven, nor did she feel her usual glow of happiness and triumph when her telephone rang on the average of ten times a day.

And then at last her date with Chase arrived. She spent two hours dressing for it, which was most unusual. As a rule she dressed in twenty minutes.

They had dinner at the best restaurant in town and afterward went to a movie. The movie turned out to be a sad, romantic one about a timid, shy boy who had fallen in love with a girl who was bad for him. Binnie cried over it.

And afterward, when Chase took her home, she was wistful and sad. Of course, inwardly she was excited over the way the evening had worked out. The movie made marvelous material in her campaign.

When Chase said worriedly, "What's wrong, Binnie?" she looked more forlorn than ever.

"It's just that it was so real, so true to life! I'm so like that girl—bad for you, Chase," she told him.

Then she added when Chase protested, "I'm just not going to see you any more,

Chase. Tonight frightened me. I can see so well what could happen. You're a lot like that boy in the movie—quiet and shy."

Beside her, Chase stiffened, and she knew he was indignant. Men didn't like to be told they were shy and quiet. They wanted to think of themselves as dangerous heartbreakers. And Chase was, really.

He proved it then and there. He caught her to him and kissed her firmly.

She hadn't known there could be kisses like that, so thrilling and exciting and pulsating. For a timeless moment the world stood still.

Then Chase was opening the door of the car. He came round to her side and helped her out. He said from what seemed a long way off, his voice cool and matter-of-fact, "I seem to have lived through that kiss without any dangerous after effects." He seemed to stand taller. And he was handsomer than ever. And then he smiled, and Binnie's heart felt as docile as a trained French poodle.

He unlocked the front door for her and gave her a good-night kiss. It was just a light, casual kiss, but the effect of it was just as devastating as the other one, and it left her weak and trembling.

INSIDE, after he had gone, Binnie sat down on the hall chair because her knees had gone weak as wet macaroni. Chase had said, "I seem to have lived through that kiss without any dangerous after effects." He'd been right. But she was suffering from the dangerous after effects!

Binnie felt like crying, she was so crazily frightened. She'd never been face to face with love before. She'd been having a perfectly marvelous time having fun out of life, being the most popular girl in town, casually looking around for love. And now she'd found it—Chase.

It was Chase, definitely and forever. And for the first time in years all her planned technique seemed to evaporate into nothingness. She was terribly afraid that when she saw Chase again, she wouldn't be able to keep up her technique. But she had to. She had to go on working it until like the other dozens of boys she'd known, he proposed. But he was one man she wasn't going to say no to.

All the next morning Binnie rehearsed

what she would say the next time she saw him. She was in a daze. Even when Maeve went off to the club for her usual tennis and said something to her, Binnie didn't hear.

She waited all that morning and all afternoon for Chase's phone call. The phone rang dozens of times, of course, and most of the time it was for her. But it was never Chase. And he didn't call the next day, either. Nor the next.

By the third evening she was exhausted and her nerves were ragged. Chase wasn't going to call. She telephoned his home once, something she'd never done for any man, but an impersonal maid said that Mr. Morrow wasn't in.

It was Saturday night, and the night for the weekly dance at the country club. She wished she didn't have to go, but weeks ago she'd promised Larry Devon he could take her. And then, too, there was always the possibility that Chase might be there.

So she put on her newest dress and went with Larry. But after they arrived, she knew she'd made a mistake in coming. Chase was there.

Chase was there, but he had brought another girl. He came in with Marcia Keller, and he was definitely attentive. Marcia was a nice girl, but that was all you could say for her. She was dull, really. And she'd been dating Rick Freeman for years. They were as good as engaged.

Somehow, Binnie managed to finish the first dance with Larry. Then she said she wanted to powder her nose, and excused herself. Before she could escape, however, Chase claimed the next dance.

His arms around her were more than she could endure. She didn't know what to say, her eyes lost their sparkle, her hands trembled. It was the perfect time to use some technique, but all she could think of was, "Chase, Chase, I adore you," and that was certainly nothing she could say aloud.

However, Chase was bland, impersonal, as if they'd never been important to each other, as if they'd never kissed. He said, "I realize now that you were right about us, Binnie—right about your not being good for me. You're terribly exciting. There's a special kind of glamour about you. But—I owe you a lot for being so honest with me. You helped me realize that I should have married the right girl

long ago. The trouble was that I'd always been attracted to the wrong kind. You made me see what I really needed. And I think I've found her in Marcia. She's steady, dependable. She'd never hurt anyone, be flirtatious, or casual. Because of my work, my career, I need peace of mind more than most people, as you've told me. And I know Marcia will give me that."

Binnie could almost feel the floor pitch like a small boat on a choppy sea.

Chase finished, "Marcia's serene and lovable. I should have found someone like her long ago. I'm afraid my life has been quite a procession of girls who were bad for me, bad for my career. My romances were exciting but strenuous. When a man marries, he wants more than excitement."

Binnie said, "Of course." Miraculously, someone cut in then, and Binnie didn't have to listen to any more.

Early in the evening she asked Larry to take her home. She told him she didn't feel well. Actually she felt as if something had blown up, exploded, in her face. She felt she'd been holding a toy balloon that had turned into a bomb.

It was very simple, really. She'd told Chase Morrow she was bad for him, that she'd wreck his life. It had always worked before with other men, made them eager to have what they were warned against, but with Chase, who had really mattered to her, it hadn't worked. He'd listened to what she'd said and decided she was right, that she, a born flirt, had no place in his life. He'd found a girl who wouldn't be bad for him. Apparently he could kiss and forget.

Only Binnie couldn't do that. She understood, suddenly, what other girls had meant when they talked about heartbreak. And she wasn't any more able to fight it than they had been. She'd always claimed that men were heartbreakers, but Chase Morrow was the only one who'd successfully broken her heart. He'd turned out to be quite a heartbreaker, just as he'd jokingly said he would. Only now it was no joke.

BINNIE meant to stay in her room the next day, but couldn't. She kept listening for the telephone, and she knew it wasn't going to ring. At least, the right person wouldn't be calling her.

At noon she dressed and went out. She couldn't stand the waiting any longer. Maeve and a thin, long-legged boy in dusty jeans were on the porch, drinking cokes. Maeve looked ecstatic.

She followed Binnie down the walk, asked if she could borrow her white cashmere sweater. Binnie nodded assent and then said ironically, "So the secret Carter technique worked with you, did it? Don't trust it again, Maeve."

Maeve looked bewildered and then, comprehending, she said apologetically, "Oh, I—I didn't get Regan to like me that way. I let him beat me at tennis

the telephone. As she walked, she kept thinking how much wiser Maeve was, even though she was only fifteen. She'd known you couldn't risk technique on someone who was important to you.

Suddenly a car drew up beside Binnie. A voice said, "Can I give you a lift?" It was a casual tone, impersonal, and yet it made her heart beat wildly.

She looked up and saw Chase already opening the door for her. Without meaning to, she got into the car.

Chase put the car into high and said, "Where can I drop you?"

And then, to her horror, she heard

It's Love!

I WASN'T too impressed
When you said you loved me
That night, with the stars
Twinkling bright above me.



But I was convinced
The next day when
We met by chance,
And you said it again.



Anyone can get romantic,
Goodness knows,
When the night winds sigh
And the pale moon glows.

But sunshine dispels
The night's illusion
And clears away
Amorous confusion.

So if you can speak of love
In the honest light of day,
It is not a passing fancy—
Love is here to stay!

—JEANNE ABEL

instead. The—the other plan didn't work, and it's just as well—he was an older man, terribly glamorous. I'm over him now. Regan really matters to me. Your—your technique would be all right if I just wanted a long string of dates. But I don't. I want to marry Regan some day."

Binnie said nothing. She went on walking. She didn't have any special destination. She just wanted to get away from

herself asking something she hadn't planned at all. It was the kind of thing she'd always pitied other girls for saying, because it was so obviously an attempt to win a man, to make him think you were good wife material, that you'd be a distinct asset to him.

She said, "Chase, I—I wonder if you'd like to come up to the house for dinner soon? Perhaps on Thursday. That's the maid's night out, and I usually cook din-

ner for Mother."

Suddenly she felt humiliated. She was pleading with this man for a date—and each date with him would only mean more heartbreak for her.

Chase answered, "I thought you weren't domestic. I thought you were strictly a flirt who never bothered with anything as unexciting and safe and ordinary as cooking dinner for a date." His voice lost all its casualness. It was hard and accusing. Suddenly he pulled over to the side and stopped the car.

Binnie said falteringly, all at once afraid, "I—I've changed." And once again her words ran away with her, and she couldn't stop them until it was too late. "I'm—just as serene and I'd be as good a wife as Marcia Keller. I'm not really a flirt. I—all I need to do is settle down. I—"

She broke off in horror and tried to get out of the car. But Chase caught her wrist and held her fast. "Something important made you change, Binnie. It must have. It was something as important as love."

She wished she could hate him for having made her show her hand.

He went on, "If that's the reason you've changed, if you've really fallen in love, all right. I don't happen to be the kind of man who likes being just one more conquest of a flirt. Your line is good, Binnie, as lines go. But it's just a line and has nothing to do with love. I suspected it the first night I saw you and saw the effect you had on other men. Then you were so good at it that I fell for it just like everybody else.

"But there was a little girl at the club, a girl I played tennis with every morning because she was such a good player. She's a sweet kid, but just a youngster. I didn't realize she was getting a crush on me at first. Then she started using a line that was more than vaguely familiar. She told me she'd be bad for me.

In fact, she used some of your actual sentences. And when I talked some sense into her, she admitted you'd handed down your line to her as one would a family heirloom."

SO MAEVE'S glamorous older man had been Chase. It was funny, really, only she couldn't laugh about it. She could only feel her eyes fill with stinging tears, feel her lips tremble humiliatingly.

"I got out of your life, but I don't want to stay out," Chase finished. "I—staged that act with Marcia. She and Rick were in on my secret. I hoped that by pretending not to fall for you, you'd become jealous, want me all the more. I've been casual with you, a heartbreaker as you were a flirt, but when I saw you today, looking so obviously hurt, I couldn't go on with my act. I'm in love with you, or I suppose I wouldn't have minded what you did to me. I wouldn't have minded just being another in your string of trophies."

His hand tightened on her wrists, and he turned her about to face him. He warned threateningly, "This little dinner you're going to cook for me had better not be just another new line, Binnie Carter! If it turns out to be, I—I'll—" And suddenly his threatening tone vanished, and he said tiredly, "No, I can't go on trying to break your heart. I can only go on loving you. Maybe it's hopeless, but—"

Binnie gave a little choked cry of eagerness. She said, "Chase, a flirt and a heartbreaker ought to make a wonderful couple—once they're reformed. I'll be wonderful for you. I'll be a wonderful wife, or I'll break my heart trying! I'll never disturb your peace of mind."

"Won't you?" asked Chase, and laughed. Then he kissed her. And from the pulsing, sweet excitement she felt, she knew that she'd never have any peace of heart, let alone peace of mind, when Chase kissed her.

An unforgettable story—

CONQUEST WAS HER GAME

By VIRGINIA NIELSEN

in the August issue now on sale

VARIETY LOVE STORIES

Why Men Kiss and Tell

by a Boy Who Did



I NEVER was so taken aback in my life as I was when Betty Jane walked up to me in the office the other day and said bitterly, "So you had to tell the whole gang that I let you kiss me good night when you took me home from the office party! Proud of yourself, aren't you, Chuck? You should be!" And off she tripped, leaving me standing there, wishing I were any place else.

No, I wasn't proud of myself. I'm not now. But there's something I couldn't

tell Betty Jane then that I'd like to tell all girls now. That's why I'm writing this—so girls can understand what makes a fellow seem like a heel sometimes, when he really doesn't mean to be.

A fellow likes to feel like part of a gang. He wants to do everything the other fellows do. He wants to succeed in the fields that other fellows succeed in. Up to the time he's about fifteen, he manages to hold his own with his gang if he's expert in athletics and in standing

up for his rights. But around that time girls start coming into the picture. He hears the other guys talking about girls. He hears that there are two kinds of girls—nice girls, and the other kind. And, from the talk that goes around where fellows congregate, he begins to get the idea that a fellow is a sucker if he allows the other kind of girl to put anything over on him.

He begins to go out on dates. He isn't very sure of himself, but he tries to cover up by being flip and hard-boiled and playing at being a man of the world. He wants to stand in well with girls, not only because they're important to him, but because the talk among his friends now is all about girls, instead of about boats and ball games and playing hockey. And, of course, he wants to be doing what his friends do.

In every crowd of boys there are one or two who speak with a great deal of authority about girls. "I was out with Mary last night," one of them will say. "Brother, can that girl kiss!" And the fellows grin and slap him on the back and call him a gay dog. He's supposed to know a lot, to have been around, and in their hearts the other guys envy him his experience and want to be like him. And they start looking around for girls they can tell about. They try a tentative pass here and there. Some girls say no. But eventually they find a girl who'll say yes. And then, when the girl subject comes up again, the fellow who had to be quiet the time before has something to contribute to the general talk. "I was out with Jean last night," he says wisely. "Boy, can that girl kiss!" And now the other fellows look at him with respect. He's proved his manhood! He's found a girl who succumbed to his charms.

DOES he think what he's doing to the girl's reputation? Does he figure that he's making a poor return for her confidence in betraying her? Frankly—no! Not unless he's genuinely in love with the girl. He has no feeling for or against her when he's talking about her. She's just a trophy, like the medal he got last year for swimming, a tribute to his new manhood. It's his own personal contribution to the general pool of experience shared by the fellows of his gang.

Yes, afterward, when a fellow thinks over what was said in a stag session, he's sometimes sorry. Sometimes he thinks he acted like a heel and wishes he'd kept his mouth closed. But afterward is too late. The damage has been done, the girl's name has been bandied about, and if she can be kissed, the other fellows know about it.

I'm not trying to defend fellows, and I'm not trying to defend myself. I just want to go on record about how things are, so girls will understand. But I do want to say this. Girls talk about fellows, too. They talk about dates they go on and dates they turn down and fellows whom they allow to kiss them and fellows whom they don't. And they do it for the same reason fellows do it—to stand in well with their group, to show how well they get on with the opposite sex.

And, so far as I can see, there's only one way for a girl to make certain that, when fellows get together, she isn't talked about. And that way is the simplest way in the world: don't give a fellow grounds for talking. Save those kisses for the fellow you really care about, the one who really cares about you, and cares so much that he won't use last night's kisses as subject for today's build-up.

Mystery, intrigue, South-of-the-Border romance in Elaine Heyward's newest and most glamorous novelette

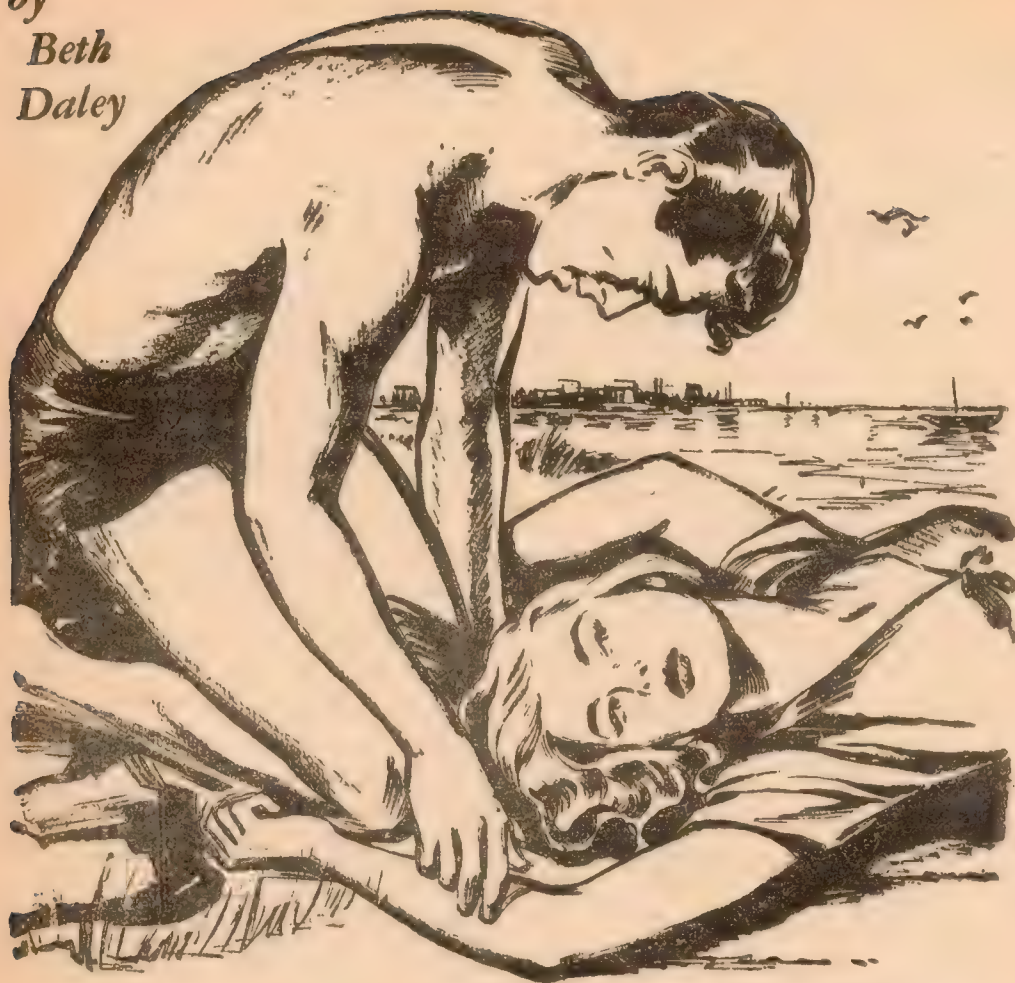
THE STORY BEHIND THEIR MARRIAGE

in the October issue of

COMPLETE LOVE MAGAZINE

now on sale at your favorite newsstand

by
*Beth
Daley*



"Are you okay?" he inquired anxiously. "Do you think you need any first aid?" He was as concerned over her as if she were the girl he loved.

Chorus Girl's Private Life

GEVA stood up in the tiny fishing boat and brought it closer to the private cove on the long stretch of Maine beach. She could see Kit Dane on the beach, alone, having a sun bath. She hoped he could see her and that he was looking her way, for she made a very quaint and charming study standing in the patched and battered little fishing boat.

Her Intentions Were Strictly Dishonorable. But What Girl Doesn't Have a Little Bit of Bad in Her?

The boat and Geva's costume had been thought up carefully. The fishing boat's one small sail had a patch of pink material, and Geva was dressed in a faded, old cotton dress that was just enough too tight to show off her divine curves. Her yellow hair hung, tangled and wind-blown, down her back. Her feet were bare, and she had no make-up on her sun-browned face. She hoped she looked like the daughter of a poverty-stricken fisherman.

At exactly the right spot, not too far from shore and within hearing distance of Kit Dane, she suddenly gave a scream and fell overboard. She was a good swimmer, but now she dove for the bottom, staying there just long enough to worry Kit Dane a little, and then she came to the surface, screaming and struggling.

Her fake drowning act was enough to make a Hollywood actress jealous, Geva thought proudly as she saw Kit run into the surf and swim out to her rescue. He reached her just as she was about to sink again. He took hold of her firmly and started swimming back to shore with her.

Geva, while pretending to be frightened and gasping for breath, opened one bright blue eye and took a good look at the famous Kit Dane. She had had him pointed out to her a number of times in New York night clubs, but this was the first time she'd ever been so close to him. He was big and dark and hard-jawed, that she knew, but she saw now that he had direct smoke-gray eyes and a deep cleft in his chin. She saw that the muscles in his big shoulders were real, and the warmth of his arm about her was something wonderful.

By the time all this had registered on Geva, he had pulled her up on the white, shell-strewn beach and had made her comfortable on the sand. "Are you okay?" he asked anxiously. "Did you swallow much salt water? Do you think you need any first aid?" He was as concerned over her as if she were the girl he loved, and his eyes were soft on her face.

She sat up, the faded blue dress clinging to her. She managed a brave smile as she looked at the big handsome man in the black swimming trunks. "I think I'll be all right now," she said in a Down East accent that would have done any Maine girl proud. "I was just trying

to catch a few fish for poor Pa. He hasn't been having much luck lately, and we depend on his fishing for a living. I guess I'm not much good with a boat."

Kit Dane looked at her with growing interest. "Are you a Maine fisherman's daughter?"

She lied sweetly. "Yes," she said, "We live way up the coast that away."

"Hey, you're just the type—" he began, then stopped and studied her face and whistled briefly, "Just the type!" he cried. "I mean for a part in the play I'm opening here at the summer theater. The girl is a New England fisherman's daughter, and she's blond and beautiful. The girl I had for the part got a chance to go to Hollywood and left the cast. I'd just been looking around, wondering if I could find a local girl. Have you ever been on the stage—I mean even in school plays?"

She smiled and said, "Well, not much."

It was working! Her little idea had worked out beautifully!

SHE wasn't, of course, a fisherman's daughter, at all. In fact a couple of months ago she'd been a redheaded chorus girl in New York. But she'd been ambitious. She didn't want to stay in chorus work. She wanted to go dramatic, so she'd joined a small summer stock company. She'd been just a maid in the third act, but she'd been thrilled to be in a real play.

The company had gone to Maine, miles up the coast, and had begun rehearsals, but they'd had their troubles. The man who was the "angel" and furnished the money had been in love with the leading lady, and so it had been a matter of keeping him happy from the beginning and then—

The trouble was that the little stock company hadn't even begun the season. The "angel" had gotten angry at the leading lady a week ago in a little Maine town up the coast and had walked out, leaving the company without financial backing, to get back to New York the best they could.

Geva had been preparing to pack and go back to New York and start tramping around to the agent's offices looking for chorus work when she'd talked to a little chorus girl who'd stopped in Kit Dane's office a few days before.

"I was hoping to get in that new show

that Kit Dane is putting on twenty miles down the coast in the little barn theater," the girl had told Geva, "but he wouldn't even talk to me. I got the old not-the-type routine from his secretary, although they need a girl in the play they're rehearsing. It's a blond girl to play a fisherman's daughter and a wonderful part, they say. The girl who had the part got a chance to go to Hollywood and walked out. She was in love with some actor in Hollywood, I heard, because no girl in her right mind would walk away from a chance to be in Kit Dane's new play."

"I know," Geva said. "He wrote and directed a hit show before he went into the Army three years ago. I read that everyone on Broadway is watching to see if he can do it again. I wonder—"

It was then that the little chorus girl had given a harsh little laugh. And then she'd said, "You'll be wondering where to get doughnuts and coffee when we start blistering our heels on the pavements in New York once again. Show business is always dead in New York in summer, but what choice do we have?"

But Geva hadn't been thinking of New York.

"So Kit Dane's company is just twenty miles down the coast, and he needs a blonde to play a fisherman's daughter," Geva had said thoughtfully.

"Darling," the little chorus girl had pointed out, "you have red hair and, besides, they say Kit Dane is very high-brow. He wouldn't put a little chorus girl in one of his serious plays, especially not for an important part. Anyhow, I heard that he was looking over native talent. He has the idea that a real fisherman's daughter would be just dandy."

"It won't hurt to try," Geva had said.

AND last week end she had come down to the little Maine coast town where Kit and his company were staying. She had found a room at a local boarding house and had easily gotten an interview with Kit's secretary.

"There is no part for a redheaded chorus girl," the secretary had said haughtily when Geva had confessed her experience and background. "We have a spot for a very good dramatic actress, but she has to be blond and, anyway, Mr. Dane has decided to try to get a local girl with a real Maine accent. He's

taking the play back to Broadway in the fall, you know, and it would be nice to have a discovery for the young lead. The star is Tanis Bancock, and, of course, she'll carry the play. You're the type for a musical, and this is very high-brow stuff. I'm sorry."

For two days Geva had tried to get to talk to Kit Dane himself, but it had been no use. She'd found out a lot of things about Dane and his company from the local gossips. She'd found out that Kit had rented an isolated villa and that it had a private cove and beach where he spent a great deal of time sun-bathing. She'd found that most of the rest of the company were living on a farm a few miles away from the coast, near the old barn that had been turned into a summer theater. Tanis Bancock, the star, was staying fifteen miles away on the estate of a wealthy movie star who was a friend of hers. The gossips had told Geva that Tanis was driven, via town car and chauffeur, to the barn for rehearsals and for performances. The company was putting on a Greek comedy in the evenings and rehearsing Kit's new drama in the mornings.

Sadly Geva had thought of the wonderful chance that she was missing. If she could only get the part, she would be back on Broadway in the fall, playing the young lead in a dramatic high-brow play just as she had always dreamed. But how could she convince Kit Dane that she could act if he wouldn't even see her? She'd known that, with her hair made blond, she could speak with a Maine accent and play the part. If only she had a chance! It was silly of Kit Dane to insist upon trying to discover a native girl for the part!

And then last night she'd had the idea. Why not be the native girl who was discovered? What could be more simple? So that morning she'd rushed to a beauty parlor and had her hair dyed blond. Then she'd hired a bedraggled little fishing boat from some youngsters on the coast, had dressed in a faded cheap dress that she'd bought from the maid at the boarding house, and by midafternoon she was sailing near the private cove where Kit Dane was said to take his sun baths. She'd sailed about for nearly two hours before Kit had appeared on the beach, and then she'd put her boat in a little closer—and gone into her act.

IT HAD all been more than successful, she realized now, and she was almost a little frightened at how easily she had won out. Kit was looking at her with real excitement in his gray eyes as he had her walk up and down the beach.

"Say, you're a natural!" Kit cried.

"I beg your pardon?" Geva asked, deciding she'd better be a little wide-eyed and dumb for fear he'd recognize that show-girl walk.

"Hey, sit down and have a cigarette," Kit said. "I forgot you just had a bad scare."

Geva shook her head. "Pa doesn't approve of me smoking," she said.

Kit laughed. "You're wonderful!" he said. "And when I said you were a natural, I just meant that you're a natural beauty, simple, unspoiled, and perfect, even to the way you walk, so free and proud. I've been seeing some of these native girls for the past week. All my company has been rounding them up for me, but something is always wrong. In the first place, few of them are really blond or beautiful, and those who are have something else wrong. But you're just the girl I've been looking for."

"I don't think I understand," she said, and then decided it was time for her to worry about the sad little boat that was wandering out to sea alone. "I have to go find someone to try to save my boat," she went on, "Pa will be furious."

"Wait, I'll pay you for the boat, and I'll sign you up to a contract that will make your Pa's eyes pop out."

He was leading her up the shell walk toward the long, low Normandy farmhouse that lay under the tall salt cedar trees that came nearly down to the coast line. On a pink flagstone terrace on the sea side of the house, a girl was sitting at a rustic table typing.

"That's Miss Adams, my secretary," he said. "She'll find you some dry clothes, and I'll rig you up a drink of hot brandy, then we'll talk turkey."

But Geva was still worrying about Pa, who was going to have to be explained away, and quick.

"I'll just tell Pa I have a summer job working for rich people," she said. "I can stay with some friends in town or at a boardinghouse. I can't let you meet Pa 'cause he doesn't like New York men or theaters."

"You're marvelous!" Kit cried, and he yoo-hooed for his secretary.

Geva was a little frightened when she had to face the efficient middle-aged secretary who had interviewed her a few days ago. But the secretary didn't recognize the redheaded smoothie from New York in this blond bedraggled little fishing girl.

Kit introduced them and said, "Aren't there a lot of costumes stored upstairs, Miss Adams? Try to find something dry that will fit this child."

Miss Adams dashed off obediently while Kit dashed about getting some boiling water in a jug and stirring up some hot brandy. He was pouring this down her, with Geva bravely pretending she'd never tasted brandy before, when Miss Adams came running back with a peasant blouse and a bright pink skirt and some rope sandals.

She herded Geva indoors, where she helped her get out of the wet things and put on the dry clothes. She combed out the wet tangles of Geva's blond hair, dusted some powder across her nose, and took her back out on the terrace to greet Kit Dane.

"Here's what the tide brought in," Miss Adams grinned. "Nice fishing, Mr. Dane!"

Geva smiled in real embarrassment now, for she was still afraid that Miss Adams might recognize the redheaded chorus girl who had applied for a job only a few days before.

"I knew she'd be a beauty!" he cried happily as he looked her up and down.

"She is lovely," the secretary said thoughtfully. "I believe you've found the girl, Mr. Dane."

With that, Geva could relax. If she'd fooled cool and observant Miss Adams, she had nothing to worry about. She had packed her bags and moved from her boardinghouse that morning. They thought she'd gone home to New York. Now she must get her bags from the bus station where they were checked and find another boardinghouse where she would pretend to be a Maine girl. That was all. Then when she'd made her name in the play in New York, she'd tell Kit Dane the truth. She knew her intentions weren't strictly on the up-and-up, but a girl in her situation had no choice in the matter.

Geva turned around slowly, knowing

how lovely she looked in the big-sleeved peasant outfit, with one shoulder revealed by the deep neck line. Her yellow hair, still damp, fell almost to her waist.

Kit Dane was delighted. He went over and put a record on his phonograph, a gypsy dance record. "Can you dance?" he asked. "The girl in the play has to dance on the beach in the moonlight to gypsy music. Here, dance with me and let's see how good you are?"

Could she dance? After three seasons in musical comedies and a couple of jobs in night club choruses, could she dance? She didn't dare let him see how well she could dance, but she was light and lithe in his arms, and she followed his lead to perfection.

"You're marvelous," he said again, and smiled down into her lovely young face. "Just merely marvelous! We'll sign a contract now, shall we? You don't have to read the part. With that Maine accent, you're a natural, and I'll train you myself and turn you into a professional actress. I won't take a chance on losing you. Tonight I'll take you down to the old barn and let you see the rest of the company in action. Tomorrow you'll report for rehearsal at the barn."

SHE signed the contract with her full name, Geneva Wellington. On the New York stage she was Geva Wells, so it was better to use her full name here.

"You are eighteen, aren't you?" he asked. "And Pa won't shoot me for this, will he?"

"Don't bother about Pa," she said sweetly. "I'll manage him. I'll always meet you somewhere in town if you want to see me. It's better that way."

He accepted that, and so that took care of Pa who didn't exist anyway. The rest of that day was a dream come true. Just as she was about to be taken back to town in Kit's low blue roadster, some of the younger members of the cast dropped by for cocktails, so she stayed and was introduced to Candy Ferris, a stub-nose miss who had a juvenile part in the play and to Pete Day, who looked like a juvenile, but who played character roles.

They stayed for a swim, and by the time they left, it was nearly sundown. And so, since it was nearly time to drive

to the barn, Kit asked her to have supper with him on his terrace, and then they drove through the lavender dusk to the barn. There, sitting next to Kit, she saw the comedy. And later they went back stage and met the rest of the cast, including the famous Tanis Bancock.

"Tanis, this is our little blonde for the fisherman's daughter. She is—guess what?—a fisherman's daughter!" Kit announced. "My own discovery. I pulled her right out of the ocean myself!"

Tanis Bancock was in her thirties, but she was still beautiful and one of the most famous actresses on the New York stage. She had coils of night-black hair and great sorrowful black eyes. She gave Geva a cool nod and looked her over from head to toe.

"She's much too striking," Tanis said then, speaking to Kit. "I thought the part called for a sandyheaded child. This girl will stand out like a sore thumb!"

"Now, really, Tanis—" Kit began, but Tanis went into her dressing room and slammed the door. Hastily Kit followed her.

Candy and Pete giggled and motioned Geva to follow them out into the cool moonlit meadow back of the barn.

"Tanis," Candy said, "is in love with Kit, although she's years older than he is. She hates you on sight because you're young and gorgeous. And she wants all the attention for herself, especially Kit's attention. Kit is so wonderful. He thinks only good of everyone. He thinks Tanis is up here just because she thinks his play is so good. He can't even see that Tanis is out to marry him!"

"She'll land him if she can," Pete said. "She'll probably claw your eyes out, Geva!"

Geva was a little relieved to see a big town car, chauffeur driven, come along then and pick up Tanis. Afterward Kit, looking somewhat harassed, came out and asked Geva if she was ready to go back to town with him.

"Oh, thanks, I can take the bus," she said humbly, really feeling that he'd given her enough time for one day.

But Kit insisted in driving her into town. "I have to take care of you, you know," Kit said as he settled her into his low blue roadster. "I feel responsible for getting you mixed up with this sophisticated crowd, so I'll be sure that

you get back to town safely every evening and stuff. Where to?"

"Just let me off at the restaurant at the corner of Main Street," she said. "I'll be safe enough then, and I'll stay at the City Hotel tonight."

When he told her good night at the corner, he held her hands for a moment and looked down at her. "See here," he said, "I hope I'm doing the right thing. I mean, this may be the beginning of a career for you, and you'll meet a lot of sophisticated people and all, but remember—stay as sweet as you are!"

Geva dropped off to sleep that night with those words ringing in her ears, and she got up the next morning with the telephone ringing. It was Kit.

He said, "This is Saturday, so no rehearsals, but I'd like you to come over and go over your part with me. Some of the kids will be over later, and we'll all have a swim and stuff. I'll pick you up at the hotel at ten."

So she was up to a busy day of finding another boardinghouse where she registered as Geneva Wellington of Maine and hoped no one would remember the New York redhead who had been in town a few days ago. Then on to Kit's villa, swims, cocktails, study, laughter.

A busy day and busy days to follow. They were busy, happy days of rehearsals and of fun and of—Kit.

And—of falling in love.

Love came, quick and sudden as a summer night.

IT'S a funny thing, being in love. Nothing is the same. The sunshine is twice as golden and lit with little flames. The moonlight, which you had always thought of as being white, is suddenly diamond-bright and sparkles. The world is all dressed up like a Christmas tree when you're in love.

And that's what happened to Geva in those next two weeks before the new play opened in the middle of July—two weeks of being around Kit Dane most of the time, two weeks of rehearsals in the mornings and watching the play presented in the evenings, while Kit, sitting beside her, coached her in the fine points of stage entrances and exits. And often in the afternoons she was invited, either alone or with some other members of

the cast, to swim and have cocktails at Kit Dane's villa.

And every evening after the play Kit took her back to town, stopping often on the way for a sandwich or a few dances or for a stroll along the moonlit beach.

Kit was very tender and very serious with her. He took discovering her as seriously as possible. He corrected her speech, gave her long lectures on lady-like behavior, cautioning her not to "go Broadway" when they got back to town. He never made love to her, really, except that his gray eyes were soft, the touch of his hands tender.

But that was enough. No practiced technique of a New York wolf had ever made Geva's heart skip a beat, but this tender protective quality in Kit just sent her into a tail spin. She was in love, love, love. And that was that. She started more than once to confess who she was, but she was afraid that she would spoil everything if she did. After the play had opened, after she had proved what she could do, she promised herself, then she would tell him.

And she tried hard to do her best in her role as a fisherman's daughter in the play. In spite of the fact that Tanis, who had the starring part, was not sympathetic toward her, Geva did her best at rehearsals, throwing herself into the role of a simple, but captivating young girl. Dressed in tattered clothes, barefoot, dancing to gypsy music on the beach, falling in love with a lad of the sea—that was her part, and she put everything she had into it, plus that extra something that sparkled and glowed since she'd met Kit Dane.

She wanted to succeed not just for herself, but for Kit, because this play meant everything to his renewed career.

"I was just a flash in the pan before the war," Kit told her on one of their long seaside strolls. "I wrote a hit play and helped produce it, and then I was in the Army for three years. I'm putting what capital I have behind this play. It has to be a hit. I was lucky to get Tanis to star in it because her name will be a big draw. But this play will prove that I wasn't just an accidental success before the war. This play will establish me either as a success or as a flash in the pan."

Yes, for Kit as well as for herself, she had to succeed in the part.

AND so it was opening night in the little barn theater. Summer visitors and natives from miles around, brought by the combination of Kit Dane and Tanis Hancock, filled the barn to standing room only.

And before the third act had begun, Geva knew that it was a hit, that it would get rave reviews here and would open on Broadway with a bang. And she knew that she herself, as Kit Dane's discovery, was more than adequate. Her dancing, her acting, her looks, all fitted perfectly into the drama. Tanis was turning in a top performance. All of the other players were equally good, and when the cast left the stage for the party that followed at the country club nearby, everyone was almost hysterical with happiness.

gratulating Geva and the others, and, of course, everyone was trying to shake Kit's hand. And then the inevitable happened.

A tall, blond young man, holding a drink in one hand and a sandwich in the other, came up to Geva. "Geva Wells!" he cried. "I've been trying all evening to place you, and now I recognize you!"

Geva recognized him, too. He was a young Broadway publicity agent who had dated her on a couple of occasions when she was in a musical chorus. Geva frowned and tried to give him the high sign to be quiet, but he'd had a couple of drinks and wasn't to be silenced.

"Hey," he cried, "you were a redhead last year, weren't you? What's all this publicity about Kit Dane discovering you in a fishing boat? That's a hot one, and, incidentally, it'll make swell publicity. Broadway chorus girl opens as Kit

Happiness

By Carol Hunt

HAPPINESS

Was just a word
Others solemnly
Averred.

I went my way,
And missed the heights,
Nor guessed how sweet
Were shared delights.

Happiness
Was a word unknown
Till your lips spelled it—
On my own!

Kit was giving the party at the club after the show. All of the cast, a great many townspeople, and a lot of visiting newsmen and theatrical people from near-by summer places were present.

Everyone crowded about the members of the cast at the big cocktail lounge of the clubhouse filled with the guests. Tanis and Jock Meadows, the male star, were naturally the center of attention, although a number of people were con-

Dane's discovery in new drama! Read the story of a chorus girl's private life!"

THAT did it. In ten minutes all the newsmen and photographers who had been surrounding Tanis were around Geva. Everyone was laughing over the way she had been discovered. Blushing furiously and fighting back tears, for Kit was standing there staring at her with startled eyes, Geva tried to brave

it out by telling the truth.

"He wouldn't even interview me as a chorus girl from Broadway," she said, "so I had to find other ways of proving to him I could play the part.

She didn't dare meet Kit's eyes. Would he hate her now? But the crowd around her congratulating her, taking candid pictures, and gushing, weren't worried.

Tanis, practically deserted at the bar, had gone livid with fury. She shouted at Kit, her voice shrill with anger, "It was bad enough having her in the show when I thought she was just a country girl, but I won't have her hog the spotlight from me when she's just a cheap chorus girl from Broadway! I don't care how well she played the part—I won't go on the stage with her again. Either you fire her, Kit Dane, or I quit!"

In the awful silence that followed, you could have heard a pin drop. Kit was as pale as Tanis, and the wonderful success of the play could be heard to crash down with the silent helplessness of a house of cards. Geva could feel it happening—Tanis walking out, the show folding, the newspapers making it a laughing scandal for the gossip columns.

Geva could feel it happening, and she knew in that moment that it was she, Geva, who must walk out. She must walk out as gracefully as possible, leaving Kit Dane with his star and his success. After all, he'd be able to find another blonde for the fisherman's daughter, perhaps one who would please Tanis.

And so it was Geva who spoke then. Dropping the Maine accent that she had used for weeks, she said in her best Broadway manner, "Keep your shirt on, Tanis darling. I'm the one who's walking out. This was just a vacation lark for me, a summer fling! I can't be bothered with your highbrow plays. I'm booked for a big musical this fall, and I have to be back in New York and start rehearsals right away. In fact, since you feel the way you do, I'll let my understudy take over from here on out. So, good-by, all! Been nice knowing you!"

She didn't even look at Kit. She couldn't. And she rushed from the room, her head proudly high, blinking hard to keep the tears back until she reached the dark outside. She wept all the way to her boardinghouse in the back of the cab she took. She wept as she packed, so she would be all ready to take the

first bus to New York the next morning. She had to get away. She didn't want to see Kit again. She couldn't stand to see that the tenderness had died in his eyes.

BUT when, in a fresh suit and her eyes bright and dry, she was waiting at the bus station for the bus the next morning to New York, she looked up to find Kit walking toward her. And the first thing she saw was that he still had that tender look in his eyes, although he was looking a little worried now.

He came up to her and took her hands in his. "I just had it out with Tanis," he said. "She's quitting, so you don't have to go on with this act, honey. Let me take those bags to the hotel for you. You see, I thought last night it was an act, this being just a vacation lark and all that, so I phoned your agent in New York. I got his name from one of the newsmen. I found out that you had no job waiting there and that you'd written the agent that you were settled for the run of my play with me. So I knew that you'd just walked out to keep me from losing Tanis."

"So you had it out with Tanis, and she's quit!" Geva wailed.

Kit laughed. "That's right, but after the big write-ups the play has in all the papers today, I'll have no trouble filling her place with another big name, someone less temperamental, I hope. In any case I couldn't let you go—"

He was picking up her bags now, and she was sobbing a little with relief.

"Oh, was I really that good in the play?" she asked.

"You were good, all right, but, honey, it's more than that. I—I've been in love with you for days. I didn't say anything because I felt that you were sort of under my protection but now, that's all over, so I can break down and make love to you like mad. I'm going to begin right here."

People were kissing good-by all the time in the bus station, so no one paid much attention when the big dark man took the small blond girl in his arms and kissed her long and long. No one noticed the flames that danced in the sunshine or the sparkle dust and dream clouds that went whirling by. No one saw the tears on Geva's face, and only Geva could feel the happiness in her heart.

To Forget Yesterday

THE picture on the second page of the newspaper was of a gorgeous girl holding on to a tall good-looking man. The caption read:

Heiress announces engagement to young lawyer who is slated for post in Washington.

Sitting at the little table behind the screen in the corner of the Serenada Club, waiting for her turn to go out and sing, Gilda stared at the picture, and great tears ran down her cheeks and made spots on the paper. A shadow fell across the photograph, and a man spoke to her.

"Trying to drown yourself out by inches?" Johnny Taylor inquired lightly as he sat down. "Or trying to flood the joint, so that it gets cleaned up a little?"

by Dorothy Dow

Her Reason for Marrying Johnny Taylor Was Roger Hill

Not a bad idea, at that!"

Embarrassed at having been caught with the picture, Gilda quickly hid the paper under the table on her lap. Then she said bleakly, "It's a joint, all right, but it's good enough for fifth-raters like you and me."

Johnny whistled. "I don't know about you — though there's nothing

fifth-rate about your looks, and your voice isn't bad, but personally I resent that. What do you mean, calling me a fifth-rater?"

"You wouldn't be playing the piano in a place like this if you weren't," Gilda told him bitterly. "It's cheap. It draws a second-rate crowd. It's like the people who play and sing in it—low grade."

"Tush and tush. Never heard such rot.



Her violet-blue eyes were filled with heartbreak. Her mouth looked hard, unhappy. "Me, top girl in Roger Hill's heart?" she said sarcastically. "Don't be silly! We were just friends."

Never heard anything so silly in my life," he chided her. "Just because the big handsome brute threw you over, you sit here and hate the world and—"

Gilda cried, startled, "What do you know about anyone throwing me over? What are you talking about? You don't know anything about me. You've only been playing piano here three weeks, since Terry Rand got sick. You don't know a thing about my private business and—"

"If you have any private business, I admit I don't know a thing about it," he said. "But it wasn't very private to sit around with dreams in your eyes every night until one o'clock and then sing your song straight at table number five and then go and join the guy who sat there and let him take you home. Mr. Roger Hill is pretty well-known around town for a young fellow, even if he isn't as well-known as the dizzy doll he's going to marry. What's the weeping about? Didn't you expect it? Did you think you were top girl in his heart?"

Gilda laughed harshly and turned her head away. Her heart-shaped face, usually faintly rosy, was pale under her carefully applied make-up. She looked at least five years older than her eighteen years. Her violet-blue eyes were filled with heartbreak. Her mouth, curved in a rich line of grace, looked hard, unhappy. "Me, top girl in Roger Hill's heart?" she said sarcastically. "Don't be silly! I'm not so stupid. He's going places. He's come from places—private schools and trips abroad and a fine family and all that. He'll be a cabinet member someday—maybe a diplomat, maybe a senator. He's the cream on the top of the milk bottle. Me—I came from the shacks near the railroads and Public School No. 7 and selling ribbons in the five-and-ten and trying to sing at amateur nights. Of course, I didn't think I rated with him."

Johnny said with deceptive mildness, "That's fine. I had the wrong idea. I thought he gave you a line and then ran out on you. Silly of me to think that, but maybe I was sort of looking for a kindred spirit. You see, a girl did that to me, a girl I thought a lot of, too, a girl I trusted in a big way."

GILDA turned to look at him. He was attractive-looking—tall, dark, well-built, his face clean-cut. Before she

hadn't noticed his looks particularly because her mind had been so full of Roger Hill. She said impulsively, "If you're singing the blues, I'm sorry. But pick out your own kind of girl, a girl who belongs in places like this if you don't want to get hurt."

"You mean someone like you?"

She flushed. "No. Yes. Someone like me, someone who never has been anyone, never will be anyone."

"Terry must have been carrying a torch for you then," Johnny said, "because he told me you were quite a person. He told me you had fought your way up, gotten an education, trained your voice yourself, kept straight. He said you were going places with your voice—"

"Yes?" Her laughter was more wretched than any tears could be. "That was a nice sort of pipe dream I used to kid myself talking about. I'm not going any place except where the rest of the girls go who sing here—day-by-day life, sailor's sweetheart, beaux and drinks and parties."

"That's another thing Terry said. He said you didn't drink, and he said you didn't run around."

"I'm starting tonight, after the show," she said harshly. "I'm going to every night spot in town, to ride on the crest of the wave, to have fun and not worry about anything else."

"Might be a good idea at that. Let's make it a duet."

She was frankly surprised. "You mean, you want me to go out with you?"

"That's the idea."

She hesitated. "But—well, that wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

"Let me guess what you had in mind." His face was close to hers, unsmiling. "You were going out with one of the boys who keeps asking you for dates, have him take you to the places Roger Hill goes when he takes his big heart-throb out. You were going to be as gay as can be, to let him see you didn't care. Wasn't that the idea?"

"Yes. No. What do you care if it was?" she asked petulantly.

"Just this much. That idea is good as far as it goes, but it doesn't go far enough, baby. Come clean—you are carrying the torch for him, and he did let you down just like my girl, didn't he?"

"It wasn't letting me down." Stubbornly she stared at the tablecloth, her

voice tense. "You're right. I'm carrying the torch. You're even right—I thought it was more than it was on his side. But why should it have been? People stick with their own kind—she's his kind. I'm just a night-club singer, and he's a man going places."

"He's a man who left you holding the bag," Johnny's voice was amazingly angry, as if it really mattered to him. "That's just what my girl did to me. You know what I'd like to do—I'd like to get even. I'd like to do something to prove I wasn't pining away. What about you? Are you just going to sit and take it?"

"What can I do?"

"Well, you could get married before he does—tonight, for instance. Get married and let him feel how it feels to wonder. Get married just so the crowd around here and the guy himself won't be pitying you. Get married and then burn up the town."

"Of all the absolutely crazy ideas," she said, "that takes the cake. Me, marrying you—just because we're both out in the rain, just because we're both left-overs—"

"Exactly. Two can laugh at the world better than one," he said earnestly. "It will make us both forget, won't it? What if it doesn't work out? It will take our minds off yesterday, won't it?"

She looked at him a long time, the pain and harshness in her face relaxing. Even her voice relaxed; it was all at once almost shy. She said poignantly, "To take my mind off yesterday, I'd do almost anything."

"Even marry me?"

There was a long pause in which ghosts walked in her heart, and then Gilda laughed unhappily. "To change life, to hurt him a little, to feel differently—why not?"

JOHNNY had moved back to the piano fifteen minutes before it was time for her last number. She sat quite still, sipping the glass of sherry he had sent her by the waiter, and staring into space, feeling as confused as if the one glass of wine had been a dozen. It was crazy. It was ridiculous. No one could suggest such a thing. Probably it was just a joke. But he hadn't sounded as if it were a joke. "Marry me," he'd said—the words Roger had never said.

Piano player, night-club singer—they were two of a kind. Why not? Why shouldn't they marry?

It was time for her song. She moved toward the microphone mechanically, her ears catching the beat of the chords. She was scheduled to sing a popular ballad, but that wasn't what Johnny was playing. Deeply, with a hot blue bass, Johnny was pouring out a sad and muted melody of unrequited love. A sob caught in Gilda's throat, and then she was standing before the mike and the lovely haunting words slid from her throat into space.

When the song and the encores that followed were all over, she went back to the corner table. It was only a little while before Johnny joined her: "Pete and Don are going to keep the sustaining stuff going with the violin and the guitar," he told her, "so we can be on our way."

For a moment she hesitated, but his voice sounded so assured that without being able to think clearly she was on her feet and joining him. They went out of the club together, small golden-haired girl and tall indolent-looking man, into the after-midnight quiet of the city streets.

"My car's around the corner," Johnny said, and led the way.

It was just the usual sort of car, neither shabby, nor outstandingly startling, as Roger Hill's car was. Johnny opened the door, and Gilda got in. And a few minutes later they were off.

For a while the sheer strangeness of the whole thing caught at Gilda's throat, and then suddenly she was agitated, excited, unable to believe that this was really happening.

"Johnny, just for the record, where are we going?"

"Little place about forty-five miles outside of the state where we can get married."

"Oh."

"No fuss, no trouble, all easy."

"Oh."

"Comfortable?"

"Yes, thanks."

He had nothing else to say. It was incredible, but it was true. This man beside her was the temporary piano player at the Club Serenada, and she really knew nothing about him at all, and yet she was driving as fast as possible to—

ward a marriage ceremony that would tie them together forever and ever. Gilda tried to think clearly, tried to feel her way through the maze of emotion and anger and pain into which she had been thrust by fate. What did she know about Johnny? Nothing, really, except that he was clean-cut and casual and played beautiful piano and was a friend of Terry's, which wasn't, if you knew Terry, too much of a recommendation.

She said smoothly, "I'm old-fashioned, probably. But after all, even if I didn't come from a small town, I came from a very narrow sort of life, one of the backyard neighborhoods of the city, where people stick together. So you can understand that I'd feel a little better if you told me something about yourself, considering that we're going to get married."

"Ask me what you want to know, and I'll tell you with pleasure," he answered lightly.

She hesitated. "I don't know, exactly. I just want to know what you're like, what you want out of life, all that sort of thing."

"What am I like? I'm like every other U.S. citizen, under twenty-eight and over twenty-four, who served three years in the Army," he said. "I got a bullet through my ribs, and the scar is still there. I got a bullet through one leg, and sometimes I limp. I play piano by ear, and I was engaged to a girl I'd known all my life. Out of a clear sky she wrote me a nice polite letter saying there was someone else. I was all eager and keen to put up a fight. I got on a plane to go back and argue. The someone else was a very good-looking guy with gray-streaked hair, almost forty. So I came back to the big city, and Terry needed a fill-in, and I'm in."

Gilda said tensely, "How perfectly awful. What a perfectly horrible thing for a girl to do. But, Johnny, you're well off, even if you don't see it now. A girl like that isn't worth bothering about—a girl who puts money before love—"

"No?"

"Oh, no." She put her hand over his to emphasize the words.

Unexpectedly Johnny's free hand closed over hers, so hard that it hurt, and then the hold relaxed, and Johnny was clutching the wheel with both hands. His profile in the moonlight was tense.

Gilda said huskily, "Johnny, every girl in the world isn't blind and forgetful. While the boys were away, some few girls decided that money was the important thing, but more of them are still dreaming of love. Even if you did fall in love with a girl who was no good—"

"Why," Johnny asked crisply, "do you say that? Why was she no good just because she ditched me?"

"Anyone who leads another person on to love and to trust him and then lets that other person down is no good."

"Funny, for you to say that," he said.

She cried impulsively, "I don't see why because, after all, I'm a girl, and girls understand what other girls do to men. You see an awful lot of that sort of thing—a girl playing along with one man, and all the time keeping her weather eye out for another man who may be a better bet, and when the better bet comes along, she just ditches the first man without worrying about how much it hurts him. That was what your girl did to you, wasn't it?"

"Just about."

"Then can't you see, Johnny, she isn't worth worrying about or losing sleep over? A person who lets you down is just shallow at heart and can never be trusted, so you're well off losing her."

"Just the way," Johnny snapped, "you're well off losing Roger Hill. Once a heel always a heel."

Gilda straightened sharply. "That's completely different. I explained it to you. Roger is from a different world from mine. He knew I'd never fit into his."

"No, you're wrong. He's a heel."

"He is not," Gilda protested. "And if you say he is again, I'll slap you."

"I'll say it ten times, baby. Roger Hill is a heel—makes a nice little song, doesn't it?"

Slash! Her hand struck his cheek. The sound cut the night. The car stopped dead in the middle of the road.

Slash! His hand struck her cheek. Gilda cried out sharply.

"Sorry if it hurt," he told her, "but I'm not apologizing. You need someone to slap some sense in you. And apparently I'm the only guy to do it. You don't even think straight. My girl is lower than low for throwing me over, but Roger Hill is Prince Charming for doing the same thing to you. Now listen, just for the record, maybe I know more about

Hill than you do. Maybe I know he's famous all over town for playing both ends against the middle, for always trying to get a piece of the gravy, for having worked for a rich marriage for a long time. You say he chose a girl who could be a credit to him—that's a laugh. Why, she had a runaway marriage and had an annulment when she was a kid in boarding school. Her family has had to buy her out of half a dozen scandals. She's hard and cheap and silly, but rich—rich, that's it. And you're dumb, shedding tears over a man who wants that sort of thing."

"Not dumb enough to spend another minute with you," Gilda burst out. She fumbled with the door of the car. She jumped out into the road and started to walk back toward town.

of a kind—only I'd rather be alone."

"Two of a kind, nothing," Johnny yelled. His voice was hot with anger. "We could be if you had sense. We could be two of a kind going places, two of a kind having a fine life."

"Yes, piano player and cheap singer make a swell twosome, with pity for each other thrown in."

"I'm just a piano player on vacation, if you want to know," he said. "Terry's an old pal down on his luck, and we went to school together, and I'm helping him over a tough spot. Day in and day out, I'm a lawyer and a pretty smart one, too. And when you say pity—that's a laugh. I fell in love with you, and hard, the first night I heard you sing. I remembered all the things Terry had told me about you—how hard you worked,

Lucky Lady

UNLUCKY at cards—
But am I perturbed?
You'll find me serenely
Undisturbed.



The prize was handsome,
I will admit.
But am I envious?
Not one bit!



I'm happy to grant you
Every trick.
One single heart
Is all I'll pick.

Unlucky at cards—
But, heavens above,
Who wouldn't rather
Be lucky in love!

—MERRYL LEE

From the other end of the seat, Johnny took a flying leap and was beside her, catching at her arm, so she couldn't get away.

Gilda whirled, angrily. "Let me go. I don't like you. I don't like the things you say or the way you say them. I don't believe you know for a minute what you're talking about. You're like I am—on the outside, looking in. We're two

how high you kept your head up. There was only one thing wrong with the picture—Roger Hill. I happen to know all about him in a business way—that's why I'm on the inside. But I guess you're right about one thing—we'd never click. I want a girl who's going places with me, and who'll be as proud of me as I am of her. I want a girl who can see straight and face facts and not move

in a haze of self-pity. I want a girl who's proud of fighting her way up, instead of ashamed of it."

He let go of her. He said curtly, "The key's in the car. Take it. I'll get a lift from a truck driver. Good-by, and I won't see you again as long as I live if I can help it."

JOHNNY strode off, in the direction they'd just come from, his long legs moving fast. Gilda hesitated, and then her head tilted and chin stiffened, she walked over to the car and got in. A minute later she was backing the car around and starting back to town. Her head was in a whirl. It seemed to her ages and ages since she'd been back in the Club Serenada, weeping over the newspaper picture of Roger Hill. It seemed to her ages and ages since she'd stood before the microphone, singing the blues.

It must have been ages, surely, because all at once, she knew that tomorrow she would forget all her blues. Johnny's curt words had cleared the debris from her brain. Johnny's bluntness had made her look facts in the face. Roger Hill was just what she had said Johnny's girl was—a heel. And it was silly to love a heel. Hadn't she told Johnny that? All at once, she had a new thought, which startled her considerably. Johnny's girl was one story, but it didn't make sense if what Johnny had said about having fallen in love with Gilda herself at first sight was true. One story or the other was false.

All at once, angry at Johnny as she was, she had to know which it was. She took her foot from the throttle, and let the car idle to a halt. She sat waiting for ten minutes, twenty minutes, until a rangy figure came into sight.

"Johnny!" she called. "Stop! I want to ask you just one thing, since you're so crazy about facts and truth and all the rest of it."

He came over to the car, and she asked, "How do you expect me to believe that silly story about your having fallen in love with me at first sight when all the time there was the other girl, the girl who let you down? I would be dumb to believe that story, wouldn't I? I'd be almost as dumb as you said I was."

"I don't care whether you believe I fell in love with you at first sight or not—it's true. I'll tell you what else is true.

There never was any girl who let me down. I made that up out of clean cloth, to make you see the Roger Hill picture the way it really was. I could have argued with you for months about what sort of a heel he was, and you wouldn't have listened. All wrapped up in heart-break and glamour, you were, wanting to be sad. When I told you about someone playing the same trick on me, you saw it was something to be mad about, not sad. And as for the way I feel about you—maybe this will help you understand."

He reached out. He pulled her into his arms. Starlight and dark night were mixed on her lips with a long, tender, pulse-shaking kiss. For one second Gilda fought against it, and then she was too dizzy to fight.

Johnny's arms let go of her. "Thanks for the memory," Johnny said. "I'll be on my way. I'll get a new piano player to sub for Terry tomorrow. I won't be seeing you. Go home and weep, and—"

"Johnny, wait," she burst out. "You'll have to wait. I'm dizzy, Johnny, and it's your fault. You made me dizzy, kissing me. You'll have to drive the car, Johnny, because I can't drive it now. You'll have to let me lean against your shoulder, because I'm in a whirl."

His shoulder was strong and warm.

The car went fast toward town, and nothing had really happened—just a quarrel, some sudden words, bewilderment. She and Johnny had started out to elope to forget yesterday, but they weren't eloping. She and Johnny had started out to cure two broken hearts, but all at once Gilda knew her heart wasn't even cracked. Blues songs belonged to yesterday and an attic full of trivial mistakes. Tomorrow was around the corner, shining and fine.

She said softly, "Johnny, I think you'd better finish out the week. I couldn't get used to a new piano player, and besides I want to get down to hard work on some songs. And, besides, I think I'd like to know that you were around."

"If I stay a week," Johnny said, "I'm warning you. It won't be a week as far as being around you is concerned. It will be forever."

"That," said Gilda dreamily, "suits me just fine."

Trouble for Any Man

by Viola Cornett



Challenging, Exciting, Infuriating — He Was the Kind of Man to Make Any Girl Forget Her Fiance

She said breezily, "I'm Lalage Laramie. I'd like to have you come to dinner tonight—with your manager, of course." The last words were a taunt.

CHET said amusedly, "Well, this is how the other half lives. Charming! Are you satisfied?" Chet could make her feel like a fool in no time at all. She knew that there were certain things a Laramie woman didn't do, and watching a prize fighter train definitely was one of them. But she'd been restless, impatient of the smooth groove of her life, a groove that was sliding her easily toward marriage to Chet Baxter next Sunday.

Lalage Laramie shook her thick dark hair back from her shapely shoulders. At her insistence she and Chet had ridden over from her home, The Willows, on horseback, and she knew she looked slimly and arrogantly aristocratic in her riding clothes. Tall, with a proud, beautiful figure, restless dark eyes, and a mobile red mouth, Lalage was something to look at. And "Killer" Trent's crew were frankly staring at her.

Lalage kept her dark eyes straight on Killer Trent, himself, who was boxing with another man in the ring that had been set up outdoors. He didn't look dark and violent like his name. He was blond, young, handsome, and smiling. He moved as gracefully as an animal. It was pleasant to look at him. It made Lalage feel free, like staring at something wild and uncomplicated. She drew in a difficult breath. Killer Trent was like an innocent, untouched young savage. Cruel in a physical way, perhaps, beating at other men with his big fists, but—Chet, compared to him, looked cruel.

She looked at Chet sideways as the two of them stood there surrounded by cigar-smoking, excited men talking of Killer's chances of winning the championship three days from now.

Chet was brown-haired, gray-eyed, slender. He was an aristocrat from his smooth head to the polished heels of his boots, and the riding whip impatiently tapping at his booted leg now was indicative of his whole nature. Chet had been born to command. That was the quality in him that fascinated Lalage, even as it repelled her. With her he was always the cool, perfect gentleman. But there was a twist to his mouth and a sudden fire to his kisses that made her think of a volcano smoldering deep underground. Yet that volcano had never shown even a glint of flame as far as she was concerned. Even the fire of his lips was restrained, held under with an iron discipline.

Something wild and savage in Lalage made her long to pit her will against Chet's, but something implacable in his gray eyes made her pull away from a conflict of wills. She had the feeling that if she lost to him once, she'd lose forever, that he would be a merciless conqueror.

However, she'd persuaded him to bring her here today to the oak-dotted estate

that once had belonged to an aristocratic family, but now was a prize fighter's training quarters.

Just then Chet said coolly, "Hello, Samson. Lalage, this is the Killer's manager, Joe Samson."

Lalage turned, her eyes lingering on Killer's boyish, laughing face. She expected to see a middle-aged, chunky, cigar-smoking man. Instead—and her eyes widened in surprise—Joe Samson was young, dark, handsome, and sardonic. The slow way he looked her over told her that the sort of women who hung around a prize fighter's training quarters didn't appeal to him.

It was the first time in her life she ever had felt an open antagonism toward a man, a desire to declare instant war. She met Joe Samson's scornful black eyes coolly. She said, "Samson? Unusual name. Are you the same as—"

"As the lad whose hair was snipped by Delilah?" Joe drawled. "Ugh-ugh. No dame ever gets that close to me. And I keep 'em away from my fighters, too. Dames are poison to a young scrapper on his way up." And his eyes added, "Especially ones like you! You're trouble for any man."

He was insolent, infuriating, a challenge. Lalage's cheeks flamed. She was aware of Chet's restrained grin. Served her right for stepping out of her class, she knew he was thinking. She felt a savage urge to slap at Joe Samson and Chet in the same defiant gesture.

She said coolly, "I'd like to meet your fighter, Mr. Samson. Perhaps, have him over to dinner tonight. I've never entertained a prize fighter."

JOE'S dark brows drew together. He said, "Sorry, the kid isn't accepting any social invitations just now. He's in training. Besides, he's already got a girl in San Francisco. A very nice girl!"

He might as well have slapped her face. She could almost hear Chet's inaudible chuckle. As before, she felt a savage anger at both men—one so coolly superior, the other so brutally blunt. Then her eyes narrowed because young Killer Trent was coming toward them, a robe around his square young shoulders. The afternoon sun tangled with his blond hair. He looked like a smiling Greek god. Again Lalage had that sense of being satisfied and strangely free just from

looking at his graceful young strength.

She walked straight toward him and held out her hand. She said breezily, "I'm Lalage Laramie, from Laramie Acres. Your neighbor. I'd like to have you come to dinner tonight—with your manager, of course."

The last words were a taunt, and she sent Joe a mocking glance. Then she looked again at Killer. He had taken her hand with boyish awkwardness and was smiling almost embarrassedly. He said, "I'd like very much to come, Miss Laramie. But—I'm in training, and ten o'clock is my bedtime."

Lalage saw Joe grin. It brought her blood to the boiling point. She said softly, "That's all right. We can dine at six, and it's not a long trip home for you. Won't you come?"

The blond Killer seemed bewitched by her thoroughbred look, her commanding manner. He hesitated and looked at Joe who was grimly silent. He said slowly, "Well—"

"I'll expect you then," she said. She smiled at him as she withdrew her hand. "Both of you—at six."

She could sense Chet, beside her, turning cold with anger. Joe Samson's black eyes were furious. If she waited, she thought, Joe would refuse to come. Yet somehow she knew he halfway wanted to accept that challenging invitation which had been like a glove in his face.

She said lightly, "Let's go, Chet. It's four now." She led the way to the horses tied near by. A dangerous little smile wreathed her mouth, and her chin was high. She felt more alive than she had ever felt before in all her twenty-three years of living!

Later when they were dressed for dinner, Chet said coldly, "You know what I think of this, Lalage."

Her Aunt Justine said flutteringly, "A prize fighter!"

But Lalage, slim and lovely in a gray dinner gown trimmed with scarlet, only smiled. She was full of a stimulating inner excitement. She felt reckless, like a ship cut loose from its moorings, as though the evening were full of uncharted adventure, foreign to the neat map of her life up to now. The man she'd met had done that to her, made her defy her fiancé.

Just then the maid announced, "Mr. Joseph Samson. Mr. David Trent."

So the Killer's real name was David. It was a nice name, and it suited him better than his ring name, Lalage thought. From her aunt's look of horror, however, he might as well have been announced as Killer and come in his ring trunks. As a matter of fact, he wore a neat, dark suit, as did Joe Samson.

David—she found herself thinking of him by that name now—came forward shyly. He looked like any nice young fellow of her acquaintance, Lalage thought.

"Hello," he said softly, and his eyes dwelt on her face.

Lalage realized that she must be like a fairy tale figure to him. He probably was from San Francisco's Mission district, and her own rich background must seem strange and marvelous to him. On the other hand, Joe Samson's cynical dark eyes told her that he didn't have any illusions about her. As far as he was concerned, she was just a high-hat dame who thought she was slumming. She sensed from his taut mouth that he was furious at the effect she was having on David. Lalage laughed inwardly with a strange, cruel defiance. She found herself wanting to hurt Joe and overturn Chet's snobbish ideas. Chet's air of superior, cool amusement annoyed her, and so did Joe's combative attitude. David, with his admiring blue eyes, was the only man in the room who didn't irritate her.

She smiled at him warmly. "Good evening. Aunt Justine, Mr. Samson, Mr. Trent. Mr. Trent is to fight the champion Wednesday night."

"Indeed?" Aunt Justine murmured coldly. Her tone was remote, indifferent. Lalage saw Joe Samson's black eyes snap suddenly.

Joe said, "Yeah, my boy's fighting the champ. He'll kill him, too! Show 'em that uppercut, Killer!"

HIS TONE was swaggering, insolent.

He was playing tough deliberately. Lalage was angry, but at the same time something inside her laughed like a bad small girl defying her elders.

She prompted softly, "Yes—do show us your uppercut—David."

Her tone was soft, wooing. David gave her a startled look, then his blue eyes warmed. He went into a fighter's crouch, shadow-boxed with boyish gusto, then

straightened and grinned at her shyly.

Lalage linked her arm through his as the maid announced dinner. "You must sit by me," she commanded, "and tell me all about yourself!"

She could almost hear Joe Samson growl like an angry panther. She wanted to laugh aloud. Again that tingle of reckless excitement went through her as she saw Chet's cold scowl. Two angry, dangerous men—

All through dinner she concentrated on David. Boyishly, he told her all about himself. He didn't mention having a sweetheart, though. Had Joe just been warning her away from David? Probably.

She liked the young, blond fighter. He was so simple and gentle. He wasn't tough like Joe Samson, or coolly superior like Chet. With David she could relax as though with a brother.

"I like him," she thought. He was like a defiant banner, too, waved in the faces of Joe and Chet—Joe, who thought dames were bad for a fighter, Chet, who thought a fighter should not be allowed to enter the sacred Laramie home.

Again Lalage felt like a bad small girl who had discovered a playmate her aunt didn't approve of. She smiled at David with frank friendliness. She felt warmly interested in him. He was so—so nice!

When the evening ended, David held her hand a little longer than necessary as he said good-by. He said shyly, "This has been swell. Could—could I see more of you? You can drop in to watch me train any time, you know. I do road work in the mornings. Maybe, if you were out riding around six—"

He spoke too low for the others to hear. Lalage smiled at him almost maternally. She said, "I'll go riding tomorrow morning down your way."

David's blue eyes were excited as he and Joe left. Joe's black ones were narrow with fury. He looked as though he'd like to knock her down, Lalage thought. While Chet—

When they had gone, Aunt Justine said, "I think I'll go to my room. I'm exhausted, Lalage." Her tone was reproachful. Evidently, it was too much to expect a Laramie to breathe the same air as a prize fighter and his manager.

Lalage felt angry and amused in the same moment as her aunt withdrew. She turned and looked at Chet. His gray

eyes were narrow and burning—dangerous, banked fires.

He said between his teeth, "I don't dare stay here just now, Lalage. I'm afraid of what I might say. My fiancée—flirting with a common prize fighter a week before her wedding!"

He stalked out. He was furious, Lalage knew. But there'd been a lingering, possessive quality to his last look at her as though he were looking at some possession of his in a strange, new light. She thought, "He's always taken me for granted. Now—"

Now he was jealous—dangerous. Slowly Lalage walked upstairs to bed, and dreamed all night of a volcano that erupted red flame and black lava—lava black as a man's angry eyes, and of a man capable of stirring a girl's emotions. He was the type a girl forgot her fiancé for.

The following morning Lalage rode toward David's training quarters. She pulled her horse to a halt. "Hello!" she said gaily.

David, clad in sweatshirt, slacks, and running shoes stopped beside her. Just beyond was a sleek black convertible, and a man with black hair and black eyes was scowling through the windshield at her.

Joe Samson said roughly, "We're doing road work, not attending a pink tea, Dave. Get going!"

DAVID bit his lip. Lalage's anger flamed. She said icily, "Anyone could tell that you're a stranger to pink teas, Mr. Samson, or to—anything else that's remotely civilized!"

The air quivered with her challenge. Then she stiffened, her dark head jerking upward in astonishment, for in three long strides Joe was out of the car and standing beside her. In another swift movement he had caught her by the waist and jerked her to the ground.

He said, "I don't know how they bring up ladies, but I've a hunch this never happened to you before!"

He was—he was spanking her! Four stinging times his hand descended. Then he let her go, and she faced him, breathing hard. She was aware of David, a tense young statue in the background, but he hardly seemed to exist. "You—" she said, and slapped Joe Sherman's face.

He laughed, low and angrily. "So

you're still on the fight, eh? Well, maybe this will stop you!"

He caught her in his arms and kissed her. He kissed her brutally and violently, a kiss that despised her, punished her. When he let her go again, she was crying. "I hate you," she said. "Oh, I hate you! I wish I were big enough to—"

"I am!" a grim voice said, and suddenly David was looming up beside her. "Joe, you've been my best friend. But this ends it!"

He swung viciously. Joe went down. Something about the way he fell was helpless, terribly young. Suddenly the scene was too much for Lalage. She ran for her horse, sprang into the saddle, galloped off toward home—home and its safety. She'd never leave it again!

That night she and Chet went out to the patio of Lalage's home. The tinkle of the fountain behind them was slow, delicate music. Chet said, "So you've come back to me, darling!"

Lalage drew a deep breath. This was what she wanted, this safe, dignified world. Why had she run away from it?

Standing beside Chet, lovely in ice-blue satin, she looked up at the stars. They were wild silver in the soft dark sky, a sky as dark as— She shivered remembering the violence of Joe Samson's eyes. She should think only of her fiancé, not a man who infuriated her.

Her eyes turned to the haven of Chet's face. She caught her breath as Chet's arms went around her with sudden violence. He muttered, "You're lovely, Lalage. So maddeningly lovely!"

He kissed her. It was a violent kiss, violent as his arms. She felt as though fire leapt against her lips—volcanic fires, no longer smoldering, but flaming to the sky. A strange fright went through her. There was something so overwhelmingly possessive about Chet.

Just as he released her, the maid appeared in the archway that led to the patio. She said, "Mr. Joseph Samson to see you, Miss Lalage."

Joe Samson! Lalage stiffened.

Chet spoke without asking her consent. He said to the maid, "Tell Mr. Samson that Miss Laramie is busy."

"But she's going to be disturbed," a hard voice answered, and Joe Samson appeared in the archway, too. The maid scuttled away at a nod from Lalage.

Lalage faced Joe, her slim body taut. She said coldly, "Yes, Mr. Samson?"

Joe's eyes met hers grimly. He said, "I'm not enjoying this, believe me. But there's a little matter you've got to straighten out whether you want to or not. Dave's in town, and he's drinking because of our fight. That kid's been like a brother to me, and he feels the same way about me. Now our friendship's gone haywire—because of you. But I can at least get him back in training—if you'll help me. He's got to win that fight Wednesday night. It's his big chance, and his future depends on it!"

Lalage felt suddenly miserable, guilty. She hadn't meant to cause any trouble between the two men. David was a fine fellow, he ought to win the championship. Joe was right—she could get him back on keel if she played her cards right. She said slowly, "All right. I'll come with you and see what I can do."

"Lalage, are you crazy?" It was Chet's voice, furious. Lalage turned and looked at him. His face was scarlet, contorted. He went on, "These people aren't your kind. You got into trouble by mixing with them before. You told me how this fellow struck you. I ought to thrash him for it, but I wouldn't soil my hands! And now you're going off to this other guy!"

LALAGE stared at him. She'd never seen Chet openly furious like this before. Usually he was controlled, disciplined. Now he looked—ugly, not warmly furious like volcanic fires, but cold and inhuman. She said, "Chet, I—I got things into this mess so I'll have to straighten them out."

Chet almost snarled. "If you go with this—this fellow, you needn't come back to me! Your duty is to your fiancé—"

Time seemed to stand still as she stared at him. There was no sound but the delicate tinkle of the fountain. A strange sadness filled Lalage. "I'm sorry," she said. She turned to Joe. "Let's go."

In Joe's car she pulled off her engagement ring, a long, gleaming sapphire, and looked at it with strange, remote eyes. Her finger felt gloriously free. She was aware of Joe's black eyes looking at her sideways. His face was queerly grave. This was the first time he had ever looked at her without hostility. Lalage gave him a slow, almost rueful

smile. His eyes jerked back to the road guiltily.

Fifteen minutes later they drew up in front of a rather disreputable looking bar. Joe said, "You're sure this isn't going to be too much for you?"

He was looking at her inappropriate ice-blue satin dinner gown, the pearls at her throat and at her ears. Lalage smiled, still that strange, rueful smile. So she was adventuring in another world again. Well—she'd try not to make any blunders this time!

She walked into the bar beside Joe. They found David in a little back room, alone at a table. He'd been drinking.

Lalage walked over to him slowly and sat down at the table across from him. Joe stayed in the background.

David said almost stupidly, "Hello." His blue gaze clouded angrily as he looked at her. "That Joe," he said. "He hit you. He kissed you, and you cried. And you're so lovely—"

Then he saw Joe and struggled to his feet. There was fury in his boyish face. Suddenly Lalage knew that only one thing would stop him. She said gently, "That was only—a lovers' quarrel, David. Joe and I have known each other a long time, but—we've sort of fought, always, because we come from different worlds and because he thinks I'm a flirt who only means trouble for men. Besides, I was engaged—"

She heard the quick intake of Joe's breath, but he said nothing. David sank back into his chair slowly and stared at her. He said, "But—"

Lalage laughed softly. She said, "Joe was angry because he thought I was flirting with you, and furious about things in general. But—we're all straightened out now, David. The other man's gone from my life, and—and you and Joe must be friends again. And you must win that fight and be champion!"

Tensely she watched David's face. A dozen expressions chased themselves into his bewildered blue eyes. At last he said slowly, "Well—congratulations! Joe's a dark horse. I didn't dream you two knew each other."

David hadn't really been in love with her, Lalage knew, looking at him now. He'd find some other girl while she—She, Lalage realized, would have to deal with Joe Samson. She'd told a pretty wild story about him. She was sure he'd

back her up, but what would he say to her when they were alone?

She turned and looked at Joe. He was smiling deep into her eyes. He wasn't angry in the least! He looked grateful and—something more. He said quietly, "Coming back to camp with us, kid?"

"Sure," David said good-naturedly. He shook his head as they walked toward the door. "Imagine that, the lady and the mug!"

Joe grinned at him without speaking. All three of them were silent on their way back to the training camp. When they reached there, David said jovially, "I'll find my way to bed, kids. You two go for a drive—plenty of moonlight!"

At last Lalage was alone with Joe in the car. She turned and looked at him, her mouth quivering. Something had happened inside her, something so sudden and strange she couldn't talk about it. Or, rather, she had talked about it, but Joe thought it was just a gag. She said, "Joe—"

She stopped because Joe's eyes, straight and black and compelling, held her own—held her silent. He said huskily, "Listen and don't interrupt me because if you do, I'll never have nerve enough to say this. I think—I think I've fallen for you, Lalage Laramie. Yeah—the lady and the mug like Dave said. But please don't laugh. I just want to say this, and then we can both forget it. I see now you're not really a flirt, trouble for a man. You're a grand girl, and it was swell of you to pull that gag, but the joke is—I wish it were true!"

He stopped. His eyes were as dark as the dark sky above. Lalage smiled, a smile like the moon bursting through clouds, and laid her hand on his arm. She said, "I wish it were true, too, Joe. So—let's make it true, shall we?"

They sat there in the silence, each afraid to speak, to disturb the sudden magic of the night. This was the fellow who'd always called women dames, who'd thought of them as Delilahs.

Suddenly she laughed very tenderly. She put up her hands and buried her white fingers in the deep dark hair at the back of Joe's head. She said almost humorously, "I promise you—I'll never cut your hair, Mr. Samson!"

Then she wasn't talking any more. How can a girl talk when a man is kissing her—and kissing her?"

This Month's Patterns

Fall Fashions



4952 SIZES 12 20

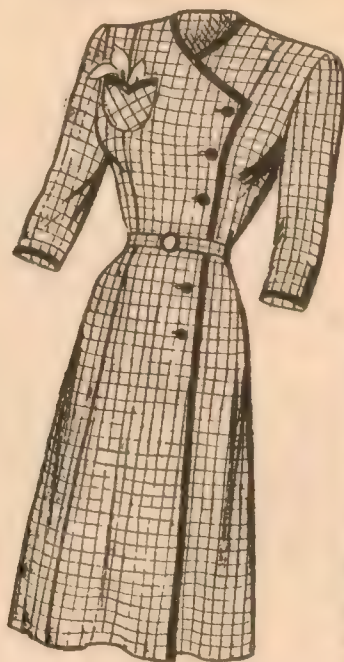
4952—New details, such as, twin shoulder yokes that may be of contrasting fabric and a perky bow at the neck, make this a smart dress for fall. Sizes 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20. Size 16 takes 3 yards of 89-inch material.

4583—This is a trim side-buttoned dress, with buttons and the binding in a contrasting color. Use checked wool or rayon crepe. Sizes 14-20. Size 16 requires 2½ yards of 54-inch fabric.

9058—Wear this smooth suit that can be made from a man's suit. Sizes 11, 13, 15, and 17. If you're using new material, size 13 takes 2½ yards of 54-inch fabric.

Send twenty cents in coins for each pattern to: VARIETY LOVE MAGAZINE, ACE FICTION GROUP PATTERN SERVICE, 248 West 17th St., New York 11, N. Y.

Fifteen cents more will bring you the Fall and Winter Pattern Book, with a free pattern printed right in the book.



4583
SIZES
14 20



9058
SIZES
11 17

Cut from a
Man's Suit

*Rio burst out, her eyes full of misery.
"Jamie lied to me! This isn't what he
promised me. This isn't the home I
want."*



Heedless of the

CHAPTER I

Gripping Novelette

IT SEEMED impossible that she'd only arrived that morning, that she hadn't lived a lifetime since dawn, a lifetime of shock and horror and disillusionment.

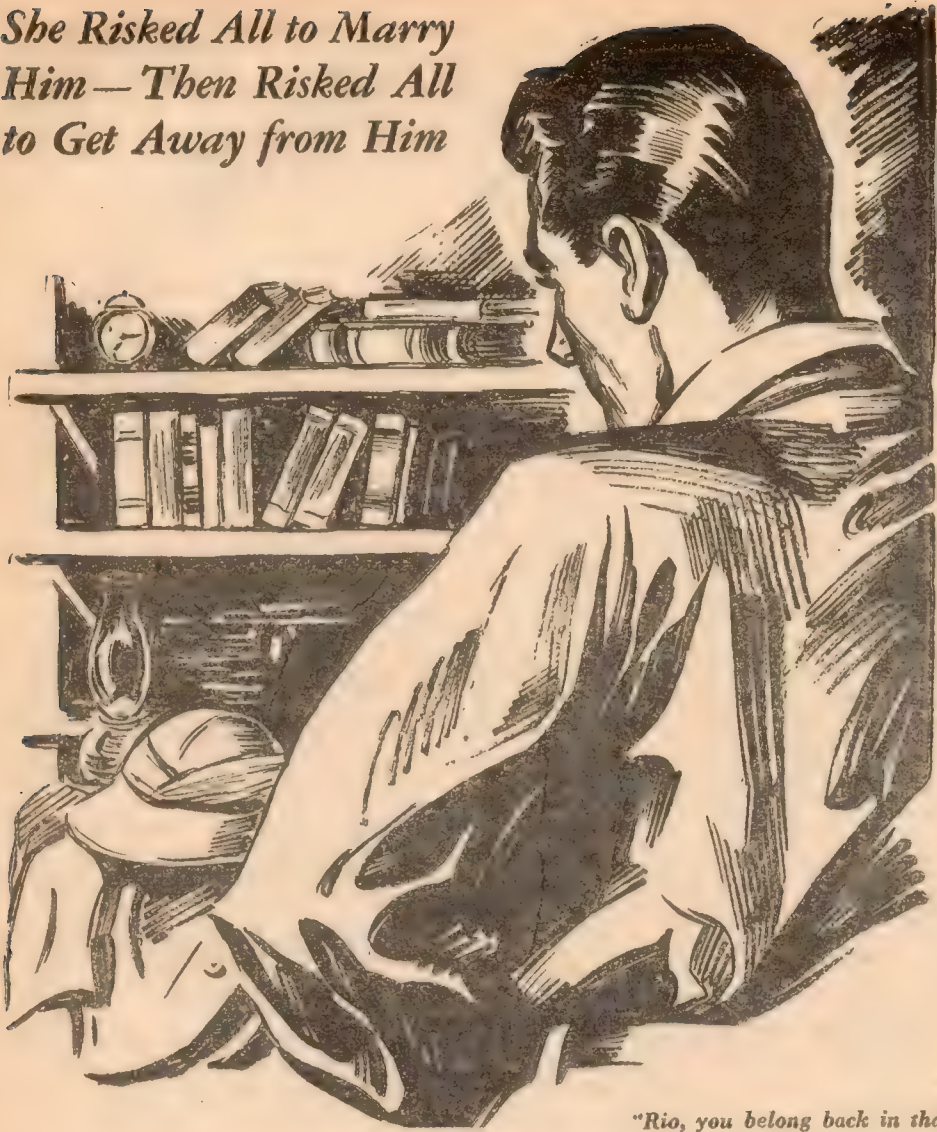
Rio stared around her at the bare room. It seemed even poorer, even shabbier, in the growing dusk. Jamie hadn't lit the lights. He seemed to sense that it would have made things worse.

"I know it isn't luxurious," Jamie said,

his voice almost a whine. "But that's because it's the tropics. You can't have anything elaborate. The heat and dampness destroy furniture and cloth. You have to have everything cool, too. It gets awfully hot."

"I know," Rio said, and there was a catch in her voice. It was hot, all right. The air was like steam. The sharkskin

*She Risked All to Marry
Him—Then Risked All
to Get Away from Him*



"Rio, you belong back in that Miami night club where Jamie was unlucky enough to stumble on you," Crest Hudson told her contemptuously.

Outcome

by Lucinaa Baker

suit she wore had long ago lost its crispness and clung whitely to her tired, slenderly rounded figure. Her hair was the only brightness in the room, and, mysteriously, the growing dark seemed to emphasize its vivid gold coloring.

Jamie lit a cigarette and then turned to her appealingly, using all the charm

she'd once loved terribly. That thought shocked her. She'd been in love with Jamie Hudson only a few short hours before, and now it was all over. She could see Jamie for what he really was.

He had a quality of romantic, dashing devil-may-careness about him, and at the same time he managed to remind her of a little boy. Only now she knew it was all studied and that the boyishness came because he was spoiled and immature. He had seemed terribly good-looking to her once, but now she noticed how weak his chin was, how evasive his eyes.

He said for the thousandth time that

day, "If I'd only known you were coming, Rio!"

"You knew I was coming within two weeks. You were going to meet me at Cayenne and bring me home. But I had to take my plane reservation when I could get it. Then I thought I'd surprise you because I knew you were really too busy to come to meet me."

That seemed horribly funny now. Jamie Hudson looked lazy, indolent, as if he hadn't worked in months.

"If you loved me," he burst out almost tragically, as if she'd betrayed him, "it wouldn't matter to you that I wasn't as wealthy as you thought! I never knew love had anything to do with money. Well, it certainly shows what you wanted. The minute you found I didn't quite come up to your ideas of grandeur, you didn't want me!"

"It isn't that!" Rio protested. "It—it was your lying to me, Jamie! You told me you and your brother owned one of the biggest gold mines in French Guiana. You said you had hundreds of men working for you, a lovely house in the tropics. And—and this is nothing like what you promised me! Hudson's Landing is just a—a squalid little river landing in the middle of a swamp. And the tropics aren't glamorous or beautiful. They're just—just terrifying and dark!"

Her words mocked her. They sounded as if what she'd wanted from Jamie was money. Actually, what hurt was that he had lied to her.

"I expected so much!" she said weakly. "It's so different!"

Just then a man appeared in the doorway of the room—Crest Hudson, Jamie's brother. She'd met him briefly earlier that day. Even then he'd known from her face what her reactions to Hudson's Landing were.

Now he said sharply, angrily, "Next time, Miss Seton, you'd better be more sure about what a man has to offer you before you agree to marry him. Maybe even a little study of geography wouldn't hurt you. You should have known that French Guiana is no paradise even if it is tropical."

His words were razor-sharp, filled with hate for her. Jamie, of course, had talked to him, told him she'd decided not to marry him. Rio burst out, her eyes full of misery, "Jamie lied to me! This isn't what he promised me. This isn't the home

I want. Jamie let me think that he—"

"He let you think he was rich," Crest Hudson finished. "Or perhaps it was your imagination. We are rich, Jamie and I, in a way. We have the best undeveloped gold mines in the Guineas. But it takes time and material to build things up after you've been away for a few years, as Jamie and I were. We were in the Army, you know. But, of course, you aren't the type to want to wait while a man gets to be a success, are you? Rio, you belong back in that Miami night club where Jamie was unlucky enough to stumble on you," Crest Hudson told her contemptuously. "Come on, Jamie. I want to talk to you."

Crest Hudson walked out, and Jamie went with him.

RIO, left alone, felt more dazed and bewildered than ever because of Crest's tirade. She'd tried to protest, and he hadn't believed her. He thought that she'd agreed to marry Jamie when she'd thought he had money and glamour and now that she'd found out the truth she was no longer interested.

"You belong back in that Miami night club," Crest had said venomously. And he was probably right. She'd have given anything to be back there, dancing in the chorus, doing a specialty singing number once in a while if she were lucky.

She'd dreamed of a glamorous marriage, of course. All girls did. Then when Jamie had come along, still in uniform, but just out of the Air Force on his way home, she'd fallen for him hard. He'd seemed to be everything she'd dreamed of. His stories about the mines at Hudson's Landing had been romantic, colorful. But that hadn't been the reason she'd fallen in love with him, she was sure. She'd fallen in love with the Jamie he'd pretended to be, gallant and gay and care-free. She knew now he'd just been playing a part. She'd known it the minute she'd arrived at Hudson's Landing and waited in the warehouse at the wharf while someone went to get Jamie.

She'd never thought of herself as a girl who could be attracted by something that was unreal. But apparently her loneliness and romantic nature had betrayed her into falling in love with the illusion Jamie had created. Their romance had been sudden and impetuous, and when she'd promised to marry him, she'd had

no reason to fear the outcome. She'd been heedless of everything but what she'd mistaken for love.

And now she knew she must appear to be a fortune-hunting little gold-digger who'd been fooled. Neither Jamie nor Crest chose to believe her when she said that Jamie's lies had killed her love for him. And she had to admit herself that it sounded like an empty story. Anyway, Crest obviously so idolized his younger brother that he could see nothing wrong with him.

Rio remembered the moment they'd confronted each other, she and Crest. It had been the worst thing she'd gone through the whole day. Crest had been so hard, so utterly cold and had detested her so completely. He was older than Jamie, and he looked as if he'd fought hard for everything he had. The fighting had toughened him, made him ruthless. The ruthlessness was in his silver-gray eyes, in the way he stood, as if he were ready at any moment to fend off an unexpected blow.

When they had faced each other, Rio had had the crazy sensation that she herself became a different person, someone ruthless and flamelike. She hadn't felt out of place in the tropics, which was ridiculous.

She had felt it again a little while before when Crest had come to get Jamie.

"I am Mademoiselle," said a soft voice. Rio looked up, startled, to see a slight old lady in a black dress and white apron looking at her. "I keep house for Crest and Jamie: I have come to take you where you will stay tonight. There is no room for you here."

Her voice was accented. Rio remembered Jamie's describing old Mademoiselle. She was the only thing that was exactly the way he'd pictured it. She was very old, French, and she had an exotic, mystical look about her because of the turban she wore. She had come here when she was very young, and she'd been working at Hudson's Landing for many years.

Rio felt Mademoiselle studying her shrewdly, not kindly, and felt uncomfortable.

Mademoiselle said at last, "It is dangerous for you to be here. You bring danger with you." There was something hypnotic about the way she spoke. "That surprises you. But this is a place, Mademoiselle Rio, which brings out what is

most dangerous in men and women alike, hidden personalities. The tropics are like that."

Rio laughed nervously. There was something about the old woman's words that rang true, even though they were nonsense. Rio said, "You were going to take me to where I can rest."

Mademoiselle replied, "Yes. Come with me. Your bags have been taken there already. You are to stay with Mademoiselle Moore. She has her own room in the building over the commissary."

Rio felt an overwhelming relief to hear the name of another girl, someone who might understand her predicament, someone she could talk to. Mademoiselle seemed to read her mind and explained, "Mademoiselle Moore is the business manager of the Hudson Mines. Her father was foreman during the war, and when he died, she took over his job. She has consented to let you stay with her."

THEY left Crest's house and walked through the dark, past a large frame building marked "Commissary." Part of it was apparently a café or night club. It was crowded with men. Out of it came the sound of men's voices, of tinny piano music. The place was obviously cheap, rough. Rio remembered ironically that Jamie had boasted, "Crest even has a recreational hall at the mines. The men don't get to Cayenne very often, and there are no accommodations for their wives as yet. Crest has entertainers from Rio de Janiero and other big cities. It's quite a place." It was quite a place, all right. It was frankly little more than a saloon. Rio shivered.

And then she was going up a stairway in the back of the commissary building, along a hall, past a door marked "Office," and to another door. Mademoiselle opened it, and they walked in.

They were in a neat little sitting room that was almost painfully in order. A girl came in, and the first thing Rio noticed was that she was young, that she might understand Rio's predicament.

Then she spoke, and Rio knew the truth. She was on Crest and Jamie's side in the situation. She said almost curtly, "I am Blanche Moore. As a favor to Crest I have agreed to let you sleep on the couch here." Her glance went over Rio mercilessly, making her feel unkempt and untidy.

Blanche herself was as stiffly neat as the room. She was tall and slim, and she wore a heavy twill skirt and a boy's shirt, high boots on her feet. "Don't," she directed Rio, "leave the compound in that kind of clothing or without a gun. There are many snakes and insects in the woods near the mines. I would also advise you to keep away from the men." Her tone indicated her complete scorn of Rio. She added, "You'd undoubtedly cause plenty of trouble, and you have already caused enough heartbreak to Jamie and worry for Crest. You turned out to be quite different from what Jamie had thought."

Rio felt like bursting out, "Please leave me alone!" but somehow she controlled herself.

Blanche said, "This is only temporary, of course. You will be going back on the next boat three days from now. Even if you wanted to marry Jamie now, Crest wouldn't allow it."

"Wouldn't he?" Rio asked hoarsely. Her head throbbed. And into her mind came the point-blank thought that she didn't have the money for her river fare to Cayenne, let alone money for a plane or boat reservation back to the States. She'd spent all the savings she'd had on her fare down and a trousseau. She'd given up her job in the States, left security behind her, really risked everything to marry Jamie. She'd never dreamed the outcome would be like this. She'd never stopped to wonder if she was doing the right thing by going to a foreign country to marry a man she'd known only a short while. How heedless she'd been! How was she ever going to right her mistake?

She said, "I've got to speak to Crest at once."

Blanche was maddeningly impersonal. "I doubt if he'll see you. I understand that he has said everything that needs to be said. I talked to him a while ago when I agreed to let you stay here. He's furious because Jamie is nearly crazy with hurt."

"I've got to see him, I tell you!" Rio half sobbed. "Where is he?"

Blanche's eyes didn't lose their coldness, but she said, "I'll take you to him. Come along."

Rio followed her out and down the hall to the door that was marked "Office." Blanche knocked and opened it without waiting for an answer. Crest was seated

before a paper-covered desk, slumped over it.

Blanche said, "She insisted on seeing you."

If Crest heard her, he gave no indication. Blanche might not even have been in the room because he saw only Rio. Between him and Rio there was suddenly a strange, elemental violence which wasn't anger.

RIO remembered what Mademoiselle had said about the tropics bringing out hidden personalities in people, danger. In that moment she was a stranger to herself because of her hatred for Crest Hudson. It was crazy, wild hatred that was stimulating and exciting and jolting, and she knew that his hatred for her was the same.

She said hoarsely, "You're a fool, Crest Hudson, or you'd realize that your brother Jamie is a weakling and a liar."

It was, of course, the worst possible thing she could have said.

Crest said, "And you're the worst kind of girl. You're beautiful and calculating and selfish. Jamie described this place as he saw it because he loves it. He thought he made you understand that we were just getting started, that someday he'd be able to give you all the things you want. He thought your love for him was real, but it was just words. Jamie's no weakling and no liar. He'd just never had any experience with—with anyone like you."

Blanche was still in the room. Rio turned to her and said, "I wish to speak to Mr. Hudson alone."

Blanche went out, her white face like an immobile mask, her eyes scornful and full of hate.

"There's nothing we have to discuss," Crest said, dismissing Rio. "You'll take the next river boat back to Cayenne. And better luck next time," he added venomously.

"I can't take the next boat back," Rio told him bluntly. She felt as if she were sinking into a deep well of humiliation. But she couldn't turn back. She had no choice. She was a stranger and alone. She said, "I don't—have the money."

First there was cynical laughter in his eyes. He said, "You really did gamble quite a lot on Jamie's being wealthy, didn't you?" His lips smiled triumphantly, then tightened suspiciously. "If you think

you can get anything out of me, you're wrong, Rio. Jamie and I have no responsibility to you. You're the one who didn't keep the bargain. Or have you forgotten that a promise to marry isn't usually casual?"

All her strength went out of her, swept away by a tide of intense hate. Before she had a chance to say anything, before she could even think, he said, "If you want money, you'll work for it. And that will give Jamie time enough to see what you really are. You're an entertainer. I need one in the recreational hall. I'll pay you what you're worth if you click with the men." He added, "That's the only job I can offer you. There's nothing else a girl can do here. Mademoiselle keeps house for us, and Blanche Moore is the bookkeeper and business manager."

He was enjoying every second of the torture he was inflicting. His dark eyes, malicious and violent, were saying, "You wanted to come to the tropics. Well, you're here. See how you like it."

"You—you'd keep me here in this horrible place just for—for revenge!" Rio gasped. "I'll pay you back the money if you'll lend it to me. There's no point in my staying!"

"You can work for the money," Crest said, his voice hard. "I'm sure you'll click as an entertainer whether you can sing or not. The customers can always look at you. But I want no trouble with the men. Is that clear?"

There was no one Rio could send home to for money. Crest Hudson was definitely in command of the situation. She would have to stay in the steamy Guiana jungle until she was sick of it. She would be reminded a thousand times a day that she had been a fool. He thought it would remind her that she had wanted Jamie's money. He wouldn't know it would mean instead recurrent regret and heartbreak and disillusionment because the Jamie she had thought existed was a phony.

She said thinly, "There must be some other way!"

Crest shrugged, his eyes mercilessly taking a scornful inventory of her beauty, making it seem shoddy and blatant. "Who knows? There are plenty of lonely men here." His implication was that she could persuade someone else to pay her way home as she had persuaded Jamie into wanting to marry her.

His words hurt a thousand times more

than they should have, as if Crest Hudson were important to her, as if she cared for him.

Suddenly she knew it could have been true. Crest was all the things she had thought Jamie was, hard and responsible and sure of himself. And under his violence, she was sure was the capacity for tenderness toward anyone he loved. His fierce, honest loyalty to his brother showed that.

But she hated him with a deep violence new to her, frightening. She said tiredly, "All right. I have no choice. When do you want me to begin?"

"How about tomorrow night?" Crest asked matter-of-factly. "You can discuss the numbers you're going to do with the pianist, Ralph Williams. It will be a try-out, really." The salary he offered her in case she passed the tryout was ridiculously small. It would take months for her to save enough to get home. But at least she could get to Cayenne soon and get a real job there.

As she left the office, he said, "One reason I'm offering you a job is that I want Jamie to get plenty of chance to see you as you are. It'll be a shock to him, but he'll get over it."

Defeated, Rio went back to Blanche Moore's bare, uncompromising room. Blanche was gone, and so was Mademoiselle. Rio threw herself across the couch and cried. It was as if she were crying over something more terrible than the lost dream of Jamie. It had only been a dream, really, she knew that now. Somehow the striking reality of Crest's presence made her see that.

THE next day she awoke once more to the almost unbearable monotony of the steaming heat. Blanche told her before she left to go to the mine office that there was coffee and fruit juice in the tiny kitchenette.

Blanche was the most garish note of the whole situation. Rio herself felt that she could fit into the surroundings whether she wanted to or not. But Blanche looked like a New England schoolteacher of fifty years before, despite her abbreviated twill skirt and boyish shirt. She made Rio long to tone down her bright red hair and arresting curves.

Rio dressed in the simplest dress she had, a lime green cotton. Now her trousseau seemed frivolous, ridiculous. But she

was glad she'd brought two formals. She could wear them to sing in at night.

She waited all morning to see the pianist, Ralph Williams. He was a worn, gnarled little man, but he could play the piano. He could do magic things to the tinny old instrument. Together they worked out several old numbers. Her voice, low and a little hoarse, blended in perfectly with the bleak setting of the sa-loonlike recreation hall.

She was afraid all that day that she would run into Jamie. She knew she would have to see him eventually, but so far she didn't know what to say to him.

It was while she was dressing in the bedroom that night, with Blanche in the living room, that Crest came to talk to her. He waited with Blanche while Rio finished combing her hair and zipped up the tawny-colored chiffon dress she'd thought she would wear to dance with Jamie on an exotic honeymoon.

Then she went out to Crest. She hadn't realized until she stepped into the room what his presence could do to her. There was no reason to it, no sense at all. But much as she hated Crest, she was attracted to him irresistibly and couldn't help being hurt because he would make no attempt to see her side of the story.

Crest looked startled to see Rio in the gleaming gown, then-resentful. When Blanche had left the room, he said, low, "I can begin to see the effect you had on Jamie." But it was not a compliment.

She snapped, "Jamie should be able to resist anyone he wanted to resist, don't you think?"

That infuriated Crest. He went ashen. "I came here to ask you if you'd seen Jamie today. Have you?"

Rio didn't answer. She laughed at him, which only increased his fury tenfold. He took two strides and was beside her, grasping her shoulders painfully tight. Yet she was thrilled by his touch.

"I—I haven't seen Jamie," she said.

Above her, Crest's face was stiff with obvious worry. He let go of her and went out.

RIO reported immediately to Ralph Williams and did her songs. But it wouldn't have mattered whether or not she could sing. The men cheered wildly, flirted, stared at her as if her beauty amazed them.

She knew she could not endure many

nights singing, not because of the tropics or the utterly desolate surroundings, but because of Crest. She had to get away from Crest Hudson, before it was too late, before she fell hopelessly in love with Crest Hudson, who hated her. But perhaps even now it was too late. It had been, she knew, since the first moment they met.

It was for that reason she flirted with Oren Stone. He was an older man, the best-looking man there, which wasn't saying much because all of them were rough and unkempt and tired from their work. Oren looked less coarse than the others, and his friends seemed to look to him to be the first to try to date her. So she concentrated on Oren. She sat at his table, let him buy her drinks which she managed to pour out when he wasn't looking, and danced with him.

It was when the recreation hall closed up that the trouble started, that there was a fight over her. She never knew exactly how it happened, but she thought it was because one of the other men spoke to her. Oren Stone turned into a stranger. He had a knife, and he intended to use it.

If the men hadn't been torn away from each other, one of them would have been killed. Their anger had been as elemental as the jungle itself.

It was Crest who stopped the fight. Rio looked into his eyes and saw how furious he was with her, and suddenly she wanted to cry, to plead for his understanding. He took her arm and forcibly led her out of the club, outside and around to the stairs that led to Blanche Moore's apartment.

At the foot of the wooden stairs he stopped suddenly and let her go. He said, "I saw what you were trying to do, Rio. You deliberately picked Oren Stone because you thought he looked more prosperous and more susceptible. You meant to get the money for your passage from him."

Recklessly she'd come to marry Jamie, but now her one aim was to get away. She said, "I meant to repay any money I borrowed," but after his accusation her words suddenly sounded ridiculous, weak. It sounded as hopeless as her insisting that Jamie's lying to her, and not his financial condition, had been what made her realize she didn't love him.

Crest ordered, "After this, leave my

men alone. If you date any of them, you lose your job. I should have known you'd cause trouble. I'm not going to have you take advantage of my men. They're so lonely and bored that they're bound to be susceptible to your charms. As for money, none of them have the kind you'd be interested in. They're working for small salaries with a percentage of the profits promised them, and that won't pay off for several months yet. So you're wasting your time."

She was inextricably trapped. Crest had told her the truth. There probably wasn't any man in the whole group who could have helped her. She thought with wry amusement, "Crest himself is my only chance! If I played up to anyone, it would have to be him!"

Crest was saying, "You've already caused enough trouble with Jamie. He's disappeared and no one has any idea where he is. He was always like that, going off alone when he was terribly hurt. But if anything's happened to him—"

Suddenly, incredibly, he seemed to know what she was thinking. His lips thinned, and he said, "You're right, Rio. I'm the logical man for you to try to influence. I've always been honest with myself, and I admitted long ago that I knew why Jamie had gone overboard for you. Any man would. But you're forgetting one thing—and that's the fact that I know what you are because of Jamie!"

She was stunned by his insight. So he admitted that he could have been attracted to her!

He went on, very low, "But you'll try to flirt with me anyway, won't you? Sooner or later you'll try it because you'll never have the courage to stick it out here and earn your way back to another chance to marry someone with money!"

"Sooner or later you'll try it, so let's get it over now!" he stormed. "You might as well know I'm not susceptible, that with me flirtation won't work. It'll save time and trouble for both of us."

He took her into his arms and kissed her with crushing force. She didn't mean to respond to the kiss, but she couldn't help herself. It was the most thrilling kiss she'd ever known.

When it was over, she knew she couldn't fight loving Crest any longer, and she was the person he hated most in the

world. He had made that so very clear.

Somehow she broke away from him and ran up the stairs. She caught one look at his face and was implacable, unmoved. The fact of his being untouched by her kiss was somehow worse than anything else that had happened to her. And there was triumph in his eyes because he thought he had been right about her trying to flirt with him. He thought she'd returned his kiss because it was her one chance to attract him!

CHAPTER II

BLANCHE was still up, though it was terribly late. She gave Rio her customary glance of scornful disdain, put away the papers she was working on. But it was almost as if she had guessed what had happened. Perhaps she'd heard them talking downstairs through the paper-thin walls.

Blanche asked sharply, "Have they found Jamie?"

To Rio's amazement she saw that Blanche's lips were trembling, her eyes full of concern. Rio suddenly, intuitively understood why Blanche hated her so much. Rio said, "You're in love with Jamie yourself!"

Blanche didn't deny the statement. She merely turned and went to her room and closed the door firmly.

Rio sat down weakly, her lips still tingling from Crest's kiss. She thought, "Oh, Jamie, Jamie, how could you hurt us both? You must have known she loved you, was waiting here for you, expecting to be your wife. It's all so obvious, and yet you lied to me and painted a crazy dream that never could come true! No wonder Blanche hates me! I was heedless of the outcome when I risked everything to come down here to marry you, but how much more heedless you were, knowing the whole situation."

Next day about noon when the two girls were eating a silent lunch together, they heard the excited cry of a man. "Mr. Hudson! Mr. Hudson!" It was just a man's voice in the bright daylight, and yet it had something of horror about it.

Rio stayed in the apartment, but Blanche went out. Rio had the crazy feeling that Blanche had been waiting for disaster to happen, expecting it.

An hour later Blanche burst into the room. Her dark hair was loose and dis-

arrayed, her face scratched by underbrush. And behind her was Crest. Both of their faces were white, set. Blanche said hysterically, "Get out of here! Get out! I won't have a murderess in my apartment."

Rio couldn't move. She turned to Crest in sick fear, forcing herself to meet his eyes. She said, "Not—not Jamie."

Crest said, "Yes, Jamie. He's dead."

Alarma shook Rio. "Blanche called me a murderess. But I had nothing to do with it! I've been here all the time. I—I wouldn't know—" Her words died because of the look on Crest's face.

He said, "Jamie killed himself with the gun he carried as protection against snakes. No, you didn't actually pull the trigger, Rio. But we figure he's been dead since sometime yesterday. He went off by himself as he always does when he's unhappy. He took an old trail to a mine we no longer operate, or we would have found him sooner."

Crest talked as if he were in a dream. His face was white, grief-stricken, and there was an intense hatred, quiet and terrible, waiting to explode in him. He finished, "You were the reason he did it, Rio. He loved you, and he couldn't take the jolt of knowing you were just a cheap imitation of what he thought you were."

"No!" Rio protested. "It was he who lied! He—he pretended to be something he wasn't. When I arrived earlier and surprised him, he didn't have time to go into the act and be prepared. He—" She stopped because she knew nothing she said would count. Now because Jamie was dead, Crest would tolerate nothing said against him. To Crest, his younger brother had been incapable of wrong.

He lifted his hand as if he meant to slap her, then dropped it helplessly. He was miserable and despite herself Rio was sorry for him.

Blanche was sobbing softly, dryly. She kept saying over and over, "It was her fault, Crest. She did it! Jamie loved her so! He had no idea she'd built up such a fantastic idea of his wealth. He described it as he did because he loved it."

Crest seemed to have himself under control again. He said, "It was obvious he killed himself. The gun was beside him. And I'd given instructions that Rio wasn't to leave the recreation hall or your room, Blanche, so she's in the clear. I've telephoned the officials at Cayenne, and

they're sending someone over to investigate. And you, Rio, are leaving on the boat tomorrow, passage prepaid to the States."

It was as if he had said, "I don't trust myself to have you around any longer. I don't know what I might do because of my hatred."

Blanche shivered. "I'm going to stay with Mademoiselle, Crest. I won't stay in the same room with her." She rushed out of the room, and Crest prepared to follow her.

Rio rose involuntarily, "Crest, wait, please! I've got to talk to you!"

He turned and waited for her to speak, but she found that no words would come. He said quietly after a moment, his voice bitter, "No, don't tell me again my brother was a liar, Rio. Don't waste words, Rio." He sounded tired, hurt.

He followed Blanche then, and Rio was once more alone. She had a feeling of being trapped, entangled in a situation not of her own making.

She thought suddenly, "It wasn't because of me that he killed himself!" But there was no other reason for him to have done so. She had to face the truth.

SHE stayed in her room for the rest of the afternoon, keenly aware of what went on outside. The men brought Jamie's body to the little house he and Crest had shared. A hush settled over the settlement, and the jungle seemed terribly close and menacing.

It was still bright daylight when Blanche came back to her apartment over the recreation hall. She came in quietly and stood looking at Rio. She wasn't crying any more, as she had been when Crest had been there. Instead there was a kind of triumph in her eyes, as if it were a victory to Blanche that Rio was going in the morning.

Rio burst out hysterically, "All this means to you is that I must leave, that Crest thinks of me as a horrible, unspeakable person. You're only glad that I'm defeated!"

Blanche replied coldly, "You're entirely right. Girls like you find life too easy. You were born lucky because you were beautiful, but you've come to the point where your beauty won't work any more. You're in love with Crest, but you'll never get him because he knows what you are even if Jamie didn't. Oh, I saw it from

the beginning, what you felt for Crest. I even saw that if the situation had been different, Crest would have fallen for you, too. But Jamie's death stopped that completely. It's too bad he had to die to do it, but at least he saved Crest by his suicide. Crest isn't in the slightest attracted to you now, although until this afternoon he was, in spite of the fact that he fought against it."

She went on, "I heard what Mademoiselle told you when you arrived—that your type was dangerous, that the jungle brought out the worst in you. And that's the difference between us, even if you are more beautiful. I can control myself and you're selfish, grasping. Because of you, Jamie had to die."

She walked over to her desk and started rummaging through the papers, completely oblivious to Rio.

Rio sat stiffly and fought tears and wondered if Blanche could even have understood the kind of suffering and punishment she was going through at that moment and would go through for the rest of her life because she'd once been foolish and young enough to believe Jamie and risk everything for an imitation love. If only she could have seen the outcome! If only she weren't so impetuous, doing everything on impulse.

After Blanche had gone, Rio felt she had to get out of these bleak rooms that were Blanche's. She went out, started walking toward the jungle. No one stopped her. No one paid any attention to her, although she passed Mademoiselle and others she knew.

She had never thought she would hate to leave Hudson's Landing, but as she walked, she knew she would do anything to avoid taking the river boat next morning, never to see Crest again. If she could only stay, she might be able to prove she hadn't caused Jamie's death.

But she knew that was a wild dream. She had in a way been responsible for what happened to Jamie. And now there was no chance that Crest would love her.

A LONG the narrow jungle road Rio felt afraid and terribly alone, but she went on and on, trying to calm her overwrought emotions. Suddenly she came in view of some long, low buildings in a clearing that was now covered over with snakelike green vines and undergrowth. The buildings were shabby

and worn and deserted looking.

Rio knew without being told that she had come down the old road Crest had mentioned, the one that had led to a mine that was no longer worked. And it had been on this road that they had found Jamie.

She stopped suddenly in the stillness, only to discover that there was no silence at all. Instead there was the roaring of insects, of leaves touching one another, and of the river running sluggishly not far away. She could understand why Jamie had come out here to get away from everyone. It was the most desolate spot possible.

As she stood there, she realized she might not be able to find her way back to the settlement and that she was wearing only a thin cotton dress, sandals, and no stockings in a jungle where Blanche always wore high boots and carried a gun as protection against snakes.

It was then that she saw the patch of white move against the green ahead of her, against the grayed outlines of the deserted mine buildings. At first, startled, she was terrified. She had no idea what she expected.

And then she saw that the patch of white wasn't white at all. It was Blanche Moore in her beige skirt and shirt, her high boots. She was searching in the green vines in what had once been the clearing. She was moving quickly, jerkily. Her movements reminded Rio of her rummaging in the desk in her room not an hour before. She was working hurriedly, with reckless haste, disregarding the danger of snakes or poisonous plants.

The scene was somehow weird. There was something garishly wrong about it, something that didn't make sense. Involuntarily Rio started walking toward Blanche.

Suddenly Blanche looked up and saw Rio. She stiffened. She said wildly, "Why are you spying on me?" Her voice was filled with fear and hate.

Rio knew that something was terribly, terribly wrong. Blanche had no business here. And yet she was here, secretly searching for something she'd apparently lost and didn't want anyone to find. Why had she been here? There was no reason for her having been here recently as the old mine had been closed for quite some time.

Rio said the first thing that came into

her head, "I've already found what you're looking for, Blanche. It was back there, just off the path."

Blanche came over to Rio, walking jerkily. Hysterically, she said over and over, "I want it, do you understand? Drop it! Give it to me! Throw it down. Drop it!"

Rio knew that she couldn't go on with her bluff and also knew that Blanche was desperate. Her coldness, her icy calm, was breaking up, crumbling because of the force of the repressed emotions behind it. Her eyes were black and dilated and horrifying. And then she took a gun out of her pocket, small and blunt and worn-looking, the gun she always carried for protection.

She said, "I know what kind of person you are, Rio Seton. You deliberately followed me here to spy on me. It was a mistake because I intend to kill you. If I don't, the jungle will. You won't find your way back alone. But first I want to know what you've done with that ledger I lost. I see you haven't got it, so you must have hidden it somewhere. I need it. Give it to me!"

SO IT was one of the mine ledgers Blanche had lost. She'd had them the day before, brought some of them back to the apartment from the mine where they'd been weighing ore. Jamie had been killed the day before. That must mean Blanche had seen him and didn't want it known!

When Rio didn't say anything, Blanche blurted out, "I—I'd given it to Jamie. He must have dropped it. But they'll think I was here when—"

"You were here," Rio said, and the awful panic she'd felt before swept over her again as she realized what had happened. "You want that ledger because you followed Jamie here and killed him. If Jamie had been thinking of suicide, he wouldn't have wanted to check figures in a ledger. He—he only wanted to go off by himself, as Crest said he did when he was unhappy. But you followed him and killed him and left his own gun beside him, so it would look as if he'd killed himself. But you dropped one of the ledgers!"

"I want it!" Blanche screamed, and it was the most unearthly cry Rio had ever heard. It expressed completely the sudden crack-up of all Blanche's repressed

emotions. "Surely you don't think you can keep me from getting it!"

And then, apparently, Blanche grew tired of waiting. She lifted the little gun and aimed it straight at Rio's eyes and prepared to pull the trigger.

Rio remembered, in spite of her wild terror, that she'd heard you could delay people who were temporarily insane by talking to them, stalling for time. And Blanche was insane.

Rio said, "You did kill Jamie. And you let Crest think I drove him to suicide."

At the mention of Crest's name, Blanche's eyes took on a mad triumph. "Yes, I killed Jamie. And Crest will always hate you."

Blanche seemed eager to boast of the way she'd kept Crest from loving Rio. She said, "Once long ago I loved Jamie, but that lasted only a short time. I soon found out that Crest was the man I really cared for. But I never mattered to him until recently. When you came, he was beginning to care. And then the first day I saw the strong attraction between you, and I knew he would be yours, too, if I didn't do something to stop it. I knew you could make him stop hating you. A beautiful girl can make any man love her." Blanche's mouth twisted, and she raised the gun again.

Rio said, "So you killed Jamie, and even though I couldn't be blamed for actually killing him, you knew Crest would think I drove him to suicide and hate me for it."

Suddenly Blanche realized Rio had been stalling her. "You haven't the ledger," Blanche said, and she lifted the gun and aimed it again.

There was a report, but even through her wild shock and faintness as she fell, Rio realized she hadn't been hit. Someone behind her had shot the gun out of Blanche's hand. And now Blanche was hunting for it frantically in the undergrowth, as she had hunted for the lost ledger.

Rio saw two men from the mines come from the road behind her. Then she fainted, and time stopped.

RIO awakened in another world, a world without green horror. She was in the room she'd been in the first day she'd come to Hudson's Landing, the clean, almost bare living room of Crest's

apartment. Crest was beside the cot where she lay, and Mademoiselle was hovering over her with smelling salts.

Rio tried to speak and couldn't. The memory of facing Blanche in the clearing came over her, and she didn't know what to tell Crest first, or if he would believe her.

As if he understood what she was struggling against and wanted to put her mind at ease, he said, "Mademoiselle saw you go into the jungle. She didn't stop you when she saw you, but a few minutes later she realized how dangerous it was for you to be in the jungle alone, and she sent men to follow you. The men got there just in time to hear Blanche's story. At first they couldn't hit the gun without hitting you. They had to be careful not to disturb her or she would have killed you instantly. But they heard the story. The police from Cayenne are coming to get her."

Mademoiselle, seeing that Rio was all right, left the room.

Crest went on, "I talked to Blanche. I think the tropics have affected her mind, as it does so many people. She was hysterical and in a crazy triumphant mood in which she said Jamie was too weak to commit suicide. She said he was a liar, a spoiled, immature boy. And she was right," he admitted, wincing. "Poor Jamie. I know he was charming, but he

was my younger brother, Rio, and I couldn't believe he was a liar. But I can understand it now. I know you really did believe in him and that you didn't fall out of love because he wasn't as rich as you'd thought. I know you never loved him because of that spark between you and me the first time we met, an emotion that bound us to each other whether we wanted to be bound or not. I wouldn't have insisted on your staying here a while if I hadn't loved you. Now I see everything clearly, and I know you're not like what I thought you were in the beginning. I wanted to believe those things about you to keep from loving you because I thought Jamie was hurt because of you."

Impulsively Rio reached out and touched his hand in a gesture of sympathy, of wanting to help, to lessen his hurt and shock and grief. And then, gradually, she realized that he had said he loved her. And suddenly she was in his arms, and they were holding each other very close.

She was comforting him now, but she knew that pretty soon he would kiss her. And she knew at last that she had Crest's love, the love Blanche had almost succeeded in killing.

It was a lasting love, a deep, real love that could only mean a happiness that would go on forever.

Shopping Hints

More than ever before, you want to get your money's worth when you buy clothes. You want to make sure your new fall suit or expensive date dress won't look shabby after a few weeks' wear. The following hints will help you the next time you go shopping:

1. Examine labels. The labels should state whether or not a cotton garment is sanforized—guaranteed not to shrink more than one per cent—state whether a garment should be dry-cleaned or laundered, and list the raw material content—per cent of wool, rayon, and cotton.

2. Examine hems, seams, ruffles, peplums, and shirring. Matching thread should have been used. Untidy and uneven stitches and crooked and skimpy seams are signs of poor workmanship and will shorten the life of your garment.

3. Examine pleats, plackets, and buttonholes. Pleats should be sufficiently deep. The plackets, whether a zipper, buttons, or snaps are used, should be neatly made and lie flat when the garment is fastened. Buttonholes, unless very carefully and neatly made, will fray and give your garment the look of age long before you expect to discard it.

4. Simple styling is important. The less elaborate your garment is, the better your chance for getting good workmanship. Today simple styling is an indication of good value.

5. The fit is the key to the length of time you'll be wearing your new outfit. If the skirt is even the slightest bit too tight, or if the shoulder line droops, or if the garment is too high-waisted, or if it has a tendency to pull up, tighten up, or crease badly when you sit in it, don't buy it. If you're not sure you look well in a dress, you'll never be happy wearing it.

Kept from Her

Wedding

GINNY DREW stood beside the highway just outside Milford. In her blue faille suit and matching hat and white top coat and gloves, with a blond leather week-end case at her feet, she looked like the last person in the world to be thumbing a ride.

And she wasn't having much luck. A green convertible whizzed by without slowing. A black limousine paused long enough for a white-haired woman to stare at her curiously. Only a red setter in a station wagon so much as noticed her.

Ginny peeked at her little diamond-studded watch. One hour to get to Beaver Junction. It was only forty-five miles, but if she were late, Nevin might decide she wasn't coming. He might think anything, even that she had changed her mind about marrying him.

Panic swept through Ginny at the thought. She didn't even have money to telephone him. If she didn't get a ride—Oh, surely he wouldn't just walk out and leave her stranded?

She heard the rattle even before she saw the jalopy.

"Jumping junk-yards!" Ginny gasped.

What it lacked in top and fenders, it made up in color. The bright yellow enamel was tastefully picked out with wide cerise stripes along the hood, and silver stars studded the doors.

Ginny closed her blue eyes, but when she opened them, it was still there. It even stopped right in front of her.

"Going somewhere, Goldie?"

He was a fine one to be commenting on anyone's hair. Ginny had never seen any redder than his. But his dark gray eyes had a nice twinkle and that one-sided grin had a certain disarming charm.

"Beaver Junction," Ginny said.

"So am I. Hop in."

Ginny stayed right where she was and eyed the jalopy with the gravest doubts. "Think you'll get there?"

"It's a tossup," he admitted frankly. "But you'd better take what offers. Hitchhikers have robbed a couple of drivers along this road lately, and nobody else is going to stop, especially for a gal who

looks more like blonde bait than a hitcher."

"I'm in a hurry. I have to be there by seven."

He swung the door open and held onto it so it wouldn't fall off. "I'm in a hurry, myself. If worse comes to the worst, we can both thumb."

Ginny bit her lip and then, more resigned than hopeful, she picked up her case and climbed in. He started the car with three jumps and a mild explosion.

"I call her *Camellia*," he drawled, "because she's beautiful and fragile."

Ginny stole a look at him out of the corners of her blue eyes. Looking at him slouched down under the wheel, she hadn't realized how tall he was. Then her heart warmed with a sudden fellow feeling of sympathy. He must be terribly poor. She knew the signs—no jacket, a faded blue shirt with the sleeves cut off short, most likely because it had worn through at the elbows, the mended place at the knee of the shabby trousers, feet without socks thrust into old tennis shoes.

Probably, Ginny decided, as she looked at the rippling muscles which showed through the frayed blue shirt, he was a day laborer trying to get from one seasonal job to another, maybe going to upstate New York to pick apples. All at once she felt wonderfully comfortable and at home with him. He was her kind of people.

THE crisp fall breeze was tugging at her hat. Ginny took it off and held it protectingly in her lap. Then she leaned her head back and relaxed in the bright warmth of the sinking sun.

"Why are you going to Beaver Junction?" he asked.

He was her kind. There was no need for coyness or pretense. "To get married. I'm to meet him at the minister's

by Hope Campbell



"I think Nevin and I'd better wait to get married," Ginny said. "It isn't right of us to have eloped this way." "And, besides, Nevin isn't quite so attractive without his money," Ted murmured mockingly.

She Had to Thumb a Ride to Her Wedding!

house at seven o'clock this evening.

He pursed his lips in a soundless whistle and gave her a sudden sharp glance. After a long considering pause,

he said, "Camellia does her best, but she's not the girl she was ten years ago."

"But you'll try?" Ginny begged anxiously.

"We'll try," he said slowly. "Tell me about it."

Ginny's face brightened. Tell him about it! Her heart and her mind were so full of this miraculously wonderful thing that had happened to her that the words simply came tumbling out. "He's—he's my boss. I'm a typist. He took me to dinner one night because he was mad about his girl standing him up. And we fell in love."

He chuckled, a deep gay sound. "That leaves a lot of gaps. But we've got a lot of time. So begin at the beginning. Who are you? I'm Ted Lockwood."

"Ginny Drew."

"Brought up where?"

"New Jersey. My mother was housekeeper for an old lady there, Mrs. Jamison. She kept me on with her after mother died and saw I went through high school and business college. Then I came to New York and got this job. It didn't pay much and living is so high—but that doesn't matter now. Nevin says I'll have everything I want all the rest of my life."

"And tell me about that."

Ginny's face began to glow again. "Oh, I just can't tell you how wonderful he is. Tall and dark and sort of soft spoken and—he's terribly rich, too. And he fell in love with me. Sometimes I can't believe it even yet."

Ted looked at her rather oddly. "He fell in love with you just taking you to dinner once?"

"Yes. He took me to this wonderful place. Nevin always takes me wonderful places, the ones I'd read about and never thought I'd see. He said I looked just like a child in front of a Christmas tree." Ginny's voice softened almost to a whisper. "He says he always wants to see Christmas stars in my eyes. He'll give me everything so they'll stay there. He doesn't like girls who take everything for granted."

"I see," Ted said a little harshly.

Ginny stared at him. "What's wrong with that?"

Suddenly his profile looked set and remote. "Why are you going to Beaver Junction to be married?"

"Because of this girl Nevin was sort of engaged to when he met me, the one who stood him up that night. It's kind of complicated. Her father is Nevin's father's best friend and the family law-

yer, so Nevin thought it might cause everybody a lot of embarrassment if we got married in New York, especially as his father's sick. We drove down here to Beaver Junction last week and got the license and arranged everything. Then Nevin unexpectedly had to fly up to Canada a couple of days ago, so he phoned me long distance at the office this afternoon to meet him here. Only—" Ginny giggled softly. "Only I did something terribly silly. Mrs. Jamison always said you could tell a lady by her luggage, and I just couldn't stand to go on my honeymoon with an old cardboard hatbox. That was all I had. So I bought this case, and I didn't realize how much the railroad fare was to Beaver Junction, and I had just enough left to get me to Milford."

"Really broke?" Ted asked.

"But really. Eight cents," Ginny looked at him with sudden anxiety. "If you wanted me to help pay for the gas or something, Nevin will give it to you."

"I'll—"

SUDDENLY the jealousy gave three explosive gasps, shook itself all over and stopped right in the middle of the road. "What happened?" Ginny cried.

"Gas line broke again," Ted drawled. "Help me push her over to the side of the road. I know how to fix it."

Ginny's hands clenched. "But—but will it take long? If I'm too late, Nevin might— Do you think he might decide I'd stood him up?"

"Nevin certainly doesn't seem very patient when he's stood up," Ted said. "But maybe it won't be any great tragedy if you never get there."

Ginny's eyes darkened. "What do you mean?"

Ted turned and looked at her, and his gray eyes were granite hard. "It sounds to me as if you caught Nevin on the rebound," he said scornfully. "And as if you're more in love with what he gives you than you are with him."

"That's not true," Ginny cried. "It's just simply not true. Oh, you can't think I'm marrying him for his money?"

"Maybe not consciously," Ted said shortly. "Maybe you're just too dazzled by it all. But being dazzled isn't being in love."

"You're hateful," Ginny choked. "And you don't know anything about it."

"I know one thing," Ted said softly.

"I'd bet this last five-dollar bill in my pocket that I could make you understand the difference."

"You!"

"Just like this," Ted murmured.

His strong arms were around her, drawing her close against his broad shoulder, before Ginny could move. She gasped, and then his lips touched hers.

This was madness, Ginny thought dizzily. She felt as if she had never been kissed before, as if this new tingling emotion were freshly flowering out of a world she had not dreamed existed. Then she stopped thinking. Only the emotion was real, and it was the only reality.

"Now tell me you're in love with Nevin," Ted taunted.

For a full minute Ginny could only stare at him, too shocked that she could react so to his kiss to think or feel anything else. Then suddenly rage flamed through her. With one move she opened the car door and jumped out.

"I'll tell you this!" she exclaimed. "I hate you. You're despicable and conceited, and—and I'll walk every step of the way before I'll ride with you."

She snatched her overnight case out of the car and started off down the road without a backward glance. As long as she thought Ted could see her, she walked straight and fast—a mile, part of another mile—most of it uphill.

But once she was over the crest and out of his sight, Ginny slowed down. Her high-heeled shoes had never been meant for walking. And that overnight bag was surprisingly heavy. She shifted it from hand to hand and limped another half-mile. All at once the sun was gone, and the evening breeze chilled her.

Ginny glanced at her watch, the only really lovely thing she had ever owned. Nevin had given it to her and now it pointed implacably at a quarter to seven. Fifteen minutes, and she was a good twenty-five miles from Beaver Junction.

FOR an instant Ginny's lips quivered unsteadily, and hot tears of worry and frustration stung her eyes. But she blinked them back, though she was tense inwardly with mingled panic and rage. Oh, to think all this could have happened for lack of a couple of dollars train fare! To think she was being kept away from her wedding for such a reason. It wasn't right. It just couldn't be. Such a little

thing couldn't cost anyone a whole life's happiness.

A rattle came up over the hill, and *Camellia* slowed down beside her. Chin tilted proudly upward, Ginny kept her face averted and marched straight on.

"You're a silly girl," Ted called softly. "Since when is saving a little pride worth losing several million dollars?"

Ginny's eyes flashed. "Because it's not the money, and if you weren't hateful and ordinary you'd know it."

"Despicable, conceited, hateful, and ordinary," Ted summed up thoughtfully. "What a lad I am! Just teeming with evil. But I'm not going to let you do it. I'm not going to be the one to keep you from your wedding."

Camellia jerked up to Ginny again, and Ted jumped out of the car. Ginny took one more step, and then suddenly Ted's strong arms scooped Ginny and her suitcase up and carried them toward the car.

"Put me down. Let me go!" Ginny shrieked, kicking.

"Right you are," Ted agreed and dumped her in the seat, jumped in himself and started *Camellia* before Ginny could move.

"Let me out of here," Ginny stormed.

"At Beaver Junction," Ted chuckled. "And little girls who jump out of moving cars break their pretty ankles, so stay where you are."

Camellia bounced and jolted along, somehow managing enough action to push the speedometer clear up to fifty now and then. But Ginny had a feeling that as much of the movement was up and down as forward.

She simply sat as far away from Ted as possible, her eyes never leaving the watch. Seven o'clock. Seven-fifteen. Seven-thirty and they were at the outskirts of Beaver Junction.

Ginny's heart began to pound. In just a minute she would know. Surely Nevin would have waited just one little half-hour for her.

"Turn right," she ordered tensely. "Stop halfway up the third block, the white house right next to the brick church."

The minute the jalopy stopped, Ginny jumped out of it and ran up on the front porch and pounded on the door. Nevin must have been waiting right by it; for he stepped out on the porch instantly.

"Dar—" Ginny began, and then broke off with a gasp.

Nevin was staring over her head, his lean aristocratic face frozen in an expression of pure shock. For an instant Ginny could only look at him, in amazed wonder that his brown eyes showed no pleasure or recognition of her presence.

Then she turned and saw Ted close behind them, grinning. "Hi, fella. You can't claim the legal firm of Lockwood and Lockwood doesn't give the Todd family every possible service. I even saw that your bride got to her wedding."

"What are you doing here?" Nevin snapped.

Ted went over to stand beside him, so tall he towered even above Nevin's smooth dark head. "I regret to say the switchboard girl at the office listened in on your Canadian call to Ginny and reported it to your father. The doctor wouldn't let him get out of bed, and my father was tied up in court, so I was dragged away from the lodge where I was hiding out for a month's rest to take care of the matter."

GINNY'S head was whirling, but she began to understand a little of the situation. Ted wasn't anybody poor. How could she have failed to recognize the name? He was the brother of that girl Nevin had been in love with before her, and the junior member of the Todd family's legal representatives.

And what a fool he had made of her, getting her to confide in him! Kissing her! The double-crossing deceiver!

"I thought poor old *Camellia* would never make it," Ted was saying. "But with Sis taking the roadster and Dad needing the limousine, I sort of got stuck with driving up to the lodge in the only other—"

"Stop stalling," Nevin said harshly. "What's this all about?"

"I picked up Ginny quite by chance," Ted said. "But the main point is that I was sent down here to disinherit you officially, in case you go through with this."

"Disinherit him?" Ginny gasped.

"With the proverbial dollar," Ted said cheerfully. "I think it's a bit tough myself, but our fathers seem to have their hearts set on a family alliance. Personally, Nevin, I wouldn't let it stop me. No-

body could tell me whom to marry. And much as I love my little sister, I have to admit she's a trying gal."

"Let me think," Nevin muttered. "Let me think."

"Ginny'd better do some thinking too," Ted drawled. "Why don't you two talk it over?"

Somehow Ted spoke to the minister and arranged everything. He led Nevin and Ginny to a small side parlor, stuffy and full of drab, shabby furniture, and left them alone.

Nevin didn't take Ginny in his arms and kiss her. He just paced the floor silently for a minute. And Ginny could only stand and stare at him numbly.

She'd never seen Nevin like this before, upset and indecisive. He had always been so gay and debonair and very sure of himself and certain that the world was his own amusing toy. With a startled shock, Ginny suddenly began to wonder if all Nevin's charm and cavalier grace could have depended on his sureness of his position as a Todd and heir to a great fortune, and not on an inner poise and balance of his own.

"What are we going to do?" Ginny asked in a small voice.

Nevin turned and looked at her, almost as if he were seeing a stranger for the first time. "Why, I guess— Maybe the old man's bluffing."

"What if he isn't?"

Nevin bit his lip and then abruptly squared his shoulders. "Then he isn't," he said a little hollowly. "But— Oh, let's get it over with."

Get it over with! Was he speaking of their wedding that way? "You mean go right ahead and get married?" she asked.

"Might as well," Nevin said a little grimly. "That's what we came here for."

He strode to the door and out of it, going somewhere toward the back of the house.

Ginny couldn't move. Her mind and emotions were in a chaotic turmoil. This had all happened too fast. Nevin was so odd suddenly that she almost felt she didn't know him at all. He hadn't given her a word or gesture of affection since she arrived. That left a cold, desolate feeling deep inside her that was spreading all through her being, chilling all the warm happiness she had had coming to meet Nevin so confidently.

SUDDENLY Ginny knew she was scared. She didn't want to marry Nevin, at least not right now and like this. She started for the door. She would tell him that the sensible thing to do was to postpone the wedding and go back to New York and talk it over with his father. They had behaved badly, rushing into things this way without a word to anyone. Maybe old Mr. Todd could understand that they'd simply been too deliriously happy and wrapped up in each other to think of anything else. At that decision, a wonderful feeling of relief simply flooded over Ginny.

"What's the decision?" Ted asked, coming into the room.

"I think Nevin and I'd better wait to get married," Ginny said. "It isn't right of us to have eloped this way. Nevin's father should have a chance to meet me. I don't blame—"

"And, besides, Nevin isn't quite so attractive without his money," Ted murmured mockingly.

Ginny gasped, and then her eyes flashed. "That isn't it at all. Oh, you are hateful. I'm not marrying Nevin for his money, but—"

"An awfully large *but*," Ted drawled, "and just what I expected."

"If you think that—" Ginny began furiously, and glared at him. She'd never hated anyone so much in her life. Sudden recklessness filled her. "I'll show you. Just you wait. I'll marry Nevin. What's the difference?"

"I wouldn't say marrying him to show me was very smart," Ted taunted.

But Ginny had realized something all at once. If she did try to postpone the wedding now, what Ted was thinking was exactly what everyone would decide, including Nevin. Ginny swallowed hard. She had to go through with it. There wasn't anything else to do. She clasped her icy hands together. She'd heard that all brides were terrified, but did all of them get this awful feeling of frantic hopeless desolation?

"All set," Nevin said, appearing beside Ted in the doorway. "Let's go."

He sounded exactly as if they were all set for some precarious and not particularly pleasant, but necessary, journey.

"Just a minute," Ted murmured. "The lady has cold feet."

"What?"

"I do not," Ginny denied frantically. "I—I just— All brides feel sort of funny, I guess."

But Nevin strode over to her and caught her hands close in his, and his dark eyes searched her face. "Tell me the truth, Ginny. If this has changed things in any way for you, it wouldn't be right to let you go through with it."

Ginny tried desperately to be honest. "Of course, it's changed things. At a wedding everyone's supposed to be happy and gay and—and pleased about it. Not like this. But—"

Nevin dropped her hands instantly. "Then that's that. I'll tell the minister it's off."

"But I don't want you to," Ginny cried frantically. "You don't understand. I was just saying that—"

She broke off abruptly. Something in Nevin's eyes had stopped her. Was that relief? Maybe, she realized suddenly, he felt exactly the same way she did. The wonderful glow and shining happiness had gone. But if he tried to call the wedding off, Nevin must realize what people would think of him for it. No one would respect a man who'd deserted a girl right at the altar because his father threatened to disinherit him. Maybe Nevin, too, had been going through with it from a sense of obligation and social pressure.

She should be humiliated, crushed, Ginny knew. But she wasn't. She was all mixed up, not even sure of what she was feeling.

"I'll tell him right now," Nevin insisted.

Something in his tone confirmed the truth in Ginny's mind. Nevin wouldn't be the one to back out. But he was certainly jumping at the first possible excuse to get out. Why, Nevin was weak! And he couldn't ever have loved her at all.

Ginny watched him leave to go back and speak to the minister, and her only feeling was one of astonishment that there was no heartbreak in her.

"He's not a bad guy, really," Ted drawled. "He can't help it if he's a drip. Any more than you can help the spot he put you in."

"I don't want your sympathy," Ginny cried.

"Just say that I happen to know the score from way back," Ted murmured.

"Nevin and Sis sort of deserve each other. They've been doing this since they were kids, having some kind of a squabble and then dashing off and working up a hectic flirtation with someone else. But this is the worst either of them has ever pulled. You got caught in the middle of a perennial row. Just try to realize you're lucky you stopped right here."

"You don't see me weeping about it, do you?" Ginny demanded out of that deep pride of hers.

"I noticed," Ted chuckled, and turned away and disappeared down the hall in the direction Nevin had gone.

LET them take care of it," Ginny thought. She felt oddly detached from it all, and more than a little ashamed of herself because she wasn't heartbroken over Nevin. And if that was true, she never had been really in love with him at all. Much as she hated to admit, Ted could be right about anything, he'd hit the nail on the head when he'd said that she simply had been dazzled and infatuated with Nevin. She'd been a stupid fool, but that rush Nevin had given her would have had any girl floating in the clouds. Maybe a more sophisticated girl would have known it for what it was, but she honestly had deceived herself.

"*Camellia* awaits without," Ted chuckled from the doorway. "Without most everything, I mean. But then you know her prankish ways."

Ginny started. "What? Where's Nevin?"

"As his attorney, I persuaded him that any further interviews would be both unnecessary and painful," Ted admitted blandly. "And as the Todds always so wisely do, he left everything in my hands."

"Then I wish you would just wash your hands of it," Ginny exploded. "I can take care of myself. And I don't want anything more to do with you."

"Eight cents," Ted drawled tauntingly.

Ginny's heart simply sank. Eight cents. He was absolutely right. Oh, how could that drip of a Nevin have gone off without even making sure everything was all right? What spots he had a gift for putting her in! And how lucky she was that he could never put her in any more.

Ginny glared at Ted. She'd never hated anything in her life as much as she hated asking a favor of him, but it had to be done. "Lend me the money to get back to New York," she begged grudgingly. "I'll pay you back. You know I wouldn't want to owe you anything."

"I sort of gathered that you didn't feel we were bosom chums," Ted chuckled. "But it can't be done. Dad called me at the lodge where I really rough it. I didn't have any decent clothes there and not much money. I wasn't kidding about that last five bucks. It's all I have with me. And it's just about enough to buy gas to get *Camellia* and us back to New York. Maybe we can stretch it to a couple of hamburgers and coffee, too, but that's the limit."

"If I were bigger than you are," Ginny said frankly, "I'd take that five dollars and leave you stranded with the greatest pleasure."

"But you aren't," Ted pointed out. "So you're stuck with me and *Camellia*."

AS THEY went outside, Ginny realized with relief that the chill breeze had died down. The moon had risen, orange and harvest-full, its brightness almost drowning out the stars and flooding everything with a clear golden light.

But after they were in *Camellia* and jouncing off toward New York, Ginny suddenly faced just how frighteningly bad things were. She couldn't go on working for Todd and Co. She would have to find a new job. And what she would live on between now and then was something she couldn't even imagine.

"Pretty bad, huh?" Ted said, as if he'd read her thoughts.

Ginny tilted her chin proudly. "Not at all. I'll make out."

"Who do you hate most for it, me or Nevin?"

"As you said, Nevin's just a drip, and he can't help it. But—" Indignation welled up in her. "That was a dirty trick, telling Nevin I had cold feet. But I suppose you were under orders to stop the wedding any way you could."

"Should I have just let you both go through with it in your muddle-headed way, and mess up any number of lives?" Ted asked softly.

"It was still our business, not yours," Ginny insisted stubbornly, and then gasped as *Camellia* gave an unusually

lively bounce. "And this! You knew that riding back with you was the last thing on earth I wanted. But you fixed it, the way you manage to fix everything. You've managed to keep me from my wedding—permanently!"

"With malice a forethought," Ted admitted, and suddenly turned *Camellia* down a curving and three-shaded lane, and stopped. "Don't you know why?"

Ginny looked up at him, at the handsome face clearly etched in bronze in the moonlight, and suddenly her heart began to race. She disliked him more than anyone she'd ever met in her life, but more strongly than that dislike she was remembering the kiss. It was idiotic and illogical, but Ginny couldn't crush down the emotion which was filling her with a treacherous and sweet longing to feel Ted's arms around her once more. Had she lost her mind? What was this?

Then she was in Ted's arms, and this kiss was lovelier than the last. It was like a heady perfume, drowning all her senses in its stinging sweetness. She could only cling to Ted and live for this moment, forgetting all else.

"Now do you see why I told Nevin? I knew exactly how he would react," Ted whispered. "But under any circumstances, even if I'd been there to bring his father's consent, I'd have stopped that wedding, somehow."

Ginny just looked at him, trying to shake off the magic spell of that kiss and to think clearly. But she could only think about Ted. He was such a strong, sure person. You could trust him to handle anything well. He was— Why, he was pretty magnificent. He was everything a girl could dream of finding in a man, and more. She shouldn't have

hated him for anything he did, because he'd been trying to arrange it for everyone's good and happiness. She should be eternally grateful to him for saving her from Nevin.

Unsteadily, because her pulse was racing so, Ginny said, "You would have?"

"If I'd had to commit perjury, kidnapping, and arson all at once," Ted swore. "I've looked all my life for a certain girl, one who was sweet and brave and unspoiled and spunky—a girl like you. And I knew you were the one when I'd found you."

"I'm—I'm all mixed up," Ginny cried. "What's next?"

Ted pressed her closer against his strong shoulder. "There are lots of nexts for us. But I think I'll start by taking you home to my family. I'll never put you in the position of having my father say he didn't get a chance to meet and know you. And he'll fall in love with you, too."

Being in his arms was like coming home after having been lost all her life. Still Ginny couldn't quite accept or believe the wonder of it. "But this is—"

"Don't say so sudden," Ted murmured, with a little tender laugh in his voice, "because it is. But love isn't a matter of time. It's people. And you won't stay mixed up long. I'll take care of that. Now I've kissed you, I know I can make you love me."

And he kissed her again. Suddenly Ginny knew Ted was right about this, too. This wasn't the feeling she'd had for Nevin. This was the sun and the moon and the stars and the solid earth beneath their feet. This was reality. This was love, and they were going to have it forever.

Give Your Lips Allure!

Hot summer days are not conducive to glamour, even though you may want to look your most glamorous. If you find your lipstick won't stay on, smudges, or is greasy, try putting it on this way.

For the best results always make sure your lips are thoroughly dry. Use a lipstick brush and start from the corners and work up. After the outline has been made, fill in the rest of your lips. Then place a cleansing tissue between your lips and blot. The real secret of keeping your lipstick on is to repeat the process. For some reason, two coats of lipstick—like two coats of nail polish—wear better and look smoother. Don't be afraid that just because you're wearing two coats of lipstick, you'll have a painted effect. The blotting takes care of that.

Romance-Jinxed



"I didn't think my misery was showing," she quipped. Actually she felt surprisingly happy, and it seemed to have something to do with his presence.

BETSY CAMERON was strolling leisurely down the street the first time she saw the genie. It wasn't a real genie, of course. It was only an evil-looking statue in a secondhand store window, but for a moment Betsy made believe that it was a genie possessing mysterious, hidden powers.

Betsy paused and peered into the window. The genie seemed to peer right

back at her shining golden hair, wide green eyes, and oval, creamy-tinted face. The statue was large and unwieldy, carved from a single block of dark, polished wood. It had beady little eyes and a frightening leer. Something about its unrelenting stare made Betsy shiver slightly, and she was just turning away from the window when a sign painted on the glass caught her eye. It read:

by Betty Webb Lucas

The Story of a Girl Who Dared to Follow Her Impulses

AUCTION TODAY
EVERYTHING IN THIS STORE MUST
BE SACRIFICED

It was silly to linger, Betsy reflected. After all, she'd just left her office for the afternoon, and she should hurry home to make herself as glamorous as possible for her date with Richard Willis tonight. Richard was an up-and-coming young attorney and the number one man in her heart, and she'd wanted to look especially nice for their dinner engagement. Nevertheless, Betsy found herself opening the door and entering the dusty, dingy little shop. A crowd had gathered in the rear of the store, and a large, red-faced man was auctioning off a rickety-looking table with remarkable success considering the fact that it seemed to be falling apart.

Betsy watched indifferently, wondering why on earth she'd ever entered this dismal place. Then suddenly the auctioneer stepped from his platform and left the room. He returned a minute later with the genie under his arm.

Enthusiastically he said, "Here, ladies and gentlemen, is a prize possession. The replica of a famous Buddhist idol which was brought to this country from an ancient temple in India and is said to possess magic powers. What am I bid for this fine example of ageless art?"

Betsy pretended to sniff indignantly, but her heart was pounding. There was something disturbing about the statue, she decided uneasily, and almost before she knew what had happened, her own husky voice called, "I'll give ten dollars!"

Another voice took up the cry. "Twelve!" Someone else shouted loudly, "Fifteen!"

Betsy glanced around, her green eyes indignant. "Twenty," she declared bluntly.

Probably someone would outbid her now, she thought anxiously. She had exactly twenty-four dollars and fifteen

cents in her purse. She couldn't afford to go any higher unless she gave up eating for a week and that might prove difficult.

Almost in a daze, she heard the auctioneer's voice saying harshly, "Do I hear twenty-five? Going—going—" His gavel smacked against a table, and he roared, "Sold to the little lady in the red coat for twenty dollars!"

For a minute Betsy didn't know what had happened. When she put twenty dollars in the auctioneer's hands, she was dazed. When he put the genie in her arms, she almost fell down beneath its bulky weight. Finally Betsy staggered out into the sunlight with her burden, but she paused, startled, when someone called after her and a tall young man approached.

He was a very good-looking young man, Betsy discovered immediately, with powerful shoulders, wavy brown hair, and narrowed blue eyes. Betsy wondered why she hadn't noticed him in the store's musty interior. He'd be outstanding in a crowd anytime.

"Hello," he said in a low, casual voice.

"Yes?"

"I just wanted to see what the victim looked like," he said pleasantly.

Betsy stared at him, eyes widening. "The victim?"

He wasn't laughing, she noted uncertainly. As a matter of fact, he seemed a little sad as he gestured toward the statue in her arms.

"I was afraid you'd buy that thing," he explained. "Tough luck."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"The blasted thing's haunted," he said bluntly.

Even then, Betsy thought it was a gag. It couldn't possibly be true. After all, she realized firmly, this was modern-day New York City. The sun was shining. Birds were singing—somewhere, anyway, and the object in her arms was simply a block of carved wood.

"Aren't you being a little dramatic?" she murmured icily. "I'm much too intelligent to believe what the auctioneer wanted me to believe, that it was an ancient Indian idol. Probably some school boy carved it. It couldn't possibly be sinister. As a matter of fact," Betsy said, talking rapidly now against the gathering doubt in his blue eyes, "I can't

even imagine what anyone would want with such a grotesque statue."

Oh, she'd asked for it, of course, Betsy decided later. All her rapid, casual talk had led very neatly to the young man's prompt, "Well, if you didn't really want the statue, why in the world did you buy it?"

That stopped her. For a minute Betsy was so taken aback that she couldn't think of anything to say. She just stood there, helplessly clinging to the idol, her green eyes bewildered. "Wh-why," she stammered helplessly, "I don't exactly know. I saw it in the window—I walked inside the shop—"

"And before you knew it, you'd spent twenty dollars on this ugly monstrosity," he finished for her neatly, shaking his head. "See I told you it was haunted. It probably hexed you."

"That's ridiculous!" Betsy was annoyed. "Anyway, how do you know so much about it?"

"I ought to know," he answered gloomily. "It was my statue."

SO THAT was that. That was the reason Betsy found herself having luncheon with the young man a few minutes later in a near-by restaurant and telling him about herself. They occupied a table, with the idol leering at them from a near-by chair, while the man explained that his name was Michael Rollins, and that he was a pilot for one of the commercial airlines operating out of New York.

"If it hadn't been for that statue," he explained gloomily, "this would have been my wedding day. It jinxed my romance. That's the reason I gave the blasted thing to the secondhand store. I thought maybe if I got rid of it, my fiancée, Jessica Gordon, would change her mind and we'd patch things up, but it didn't work out that way. She married someone else instead."

"Betsy shook her head. "I still can't believe it. After all, the idol is only a block of wood."

For the first time Mike Rollins grinned, a quick flash of white teeth showing in his dark face. Betsy's heartbeats speeded up to double time. "You heard what the man said," he quipped. "Far-off India, mysterious temples—"

Then he told her how he'd been with

the Air Force in India flying supplies across the Hump for over a year. He told her about his buddy who'd bought the idol from a native peddler during a leave in Rangoon, and who'd confided in Mike the story of its mysterious powers.

"Soon after that," Mike continued, "my buddy cracked up. He wasn't badly injured, but he was shipped back to the States for treatment. He left the idol with me. Jessica and I had been engaged for six months. We were planning to be married when I got back home so I sent it to her for a wedding present—a sort of gag. Jessica thought it was quite a gift, but as soon as I was released from the Air Force and back home again, our troubles began."

"Troubles?"

"A lot of little things," he said quietly. "Petty quarrels. Misunderstandings. Before I shipped out, Jessica and I had agreed on everything. Now we disagreed on everything. One night we had a big row over nothing, and Jessica returned my ring. She returned the statue, too, and told me she never wanted to see me again. Everytime I looked at the statue, it seemed to be laughing at me so I decided to give it away." He stopped, looked at Betsy sadly. "I suppose I shouldn't have warned you, but when I discovered you'd bought the statue and you looked so innocent, I figured you ought to know before it was too late. I don't want your romance to be jinxed, too."

For a minute little chills seemed to course up and down Betsy's spine, but she tossed her head scornfully. "I'm not superstitious," she answered airily. "I'm not afraid of mysterious idols or ancient legends. Besides, nothing could possibly go wrong with my life. I have a fine position as a staff artist on *CHIC*, the fashion magazine. I have a cozy apartment and a successful fiancé—" she broke off abruptly, flushing beneath Mike's steady gaze. He had no right to look at her, she decided uneasily, as though inwardly he was feeling sorry for her.

Betsy picked up her bag and gloves and struggled to get the idol into her arms. "Thanks for the warning, but I'm not afraid," she said hastily. "I have a date tonight. I'll be late if I don't hurry."

He walked with her to the street.

"Don't say I didn't warn you," he said solemnly. "I'll be seeing you again, Betsy."

"Seeing me?" she gasped. "I don't know why—"

Mike smiled enigmatically. He took a slip of paper from his pocket and scribbled something on it. "Here's my address and telephone number," he said. "If you need help, don't whistle. Shout!"

By the time Betsy was home in her apartment, she'd put Mike's warning words out of her mind. Undoubtedly he was a little insane, she decided. Surely no one in his right mind would believe that a harmless block of carved wood could possess mysterious powers for good and evil, even though it had come from India. Betsy put the idol on a table between the living room windows and tried to pretend that it didn't look out of place amid books and brass flower pots and her ruffled chintz draperies.

What was it Mike had said in parting? "If you need help, don't whistle. Shout!"

Her heartbeats quickened at the memory of his level, blue eyes and his quick grin, and she resolved not to think about him any more. There was nothing mysterious about the statue, she insisted firmly, except—and here her breath caught—except why on earth had she spent twenty dollars for an ugly little idol that she didn't really want?

RICHARD saw the idol the minute he entered her apartment that evening right on the dot of seven. Richard was a tall, serious-looking young man with dark hair and a lean, handsome face. Although he was barely thirty, he was already making a name for himself in his law practice. Sometimes Betsy found it hard to believe that he wanted to marry her. They were complete opposites in type. She knew he didn't really approve of her artistic career. Richard thought that stenography was the only worthwhile business occupation for a woman. He didn't approve of her apartment, either. He insisted that Betsy was spending far more money than she could afford for such tiny rooms. However, in spite of everything, she decided, Richard was really sweet, sweet and kind and thoughtful. Tonight he'd brought her a lovely corsage of violets and tickets to one of the new musical comedies.

"I thought we would make it a gala

occasion," he explained. "I won my case in court today. It was quite a feather in my cap and—" Richard stopped. He stared across the room. "What in blazes is that?"

That, of course, was the idol.

Betsy tried to account for it very matter-of-factly. "Isn't it a funny little statue, Richard? I saw it today in a secondhand store and couldn't resist buying it—" her voice trailed away weakly under Richard's surprised look, even though she knew her words were the truth. She hadn't been able to resist buying the idol, but it wasn't because she'd fallen in love with it. She'd bought it because she couldn't help herself!

"It—it has a very interesting history," she continued with an attempt at brightness. "Mike—er, that is—the man who used to own it—"

"Mike?" Richard's brows arched quizzically. "A friend of yours, Betsy?"

"Oh, no. I mean—I met him at the secondhand store, and he took me to lunch—" She broke off, flushing at Richard's accusing expression. "There was nothing wrong in lunching with him," she tried rather wildly to explain. "He's young—he's a flier—" It only got worse and worse, she realized anxiously. Nothing she could say now would help matters because Richard's methodical mind had already put two and two together and disapproved of the answer.

"I think you should return the idol to the young man, Betsy," he said firmly. "As my fiancée, you aren't free to accept gifts from other men."

"But it wasn't a gift. I bought the idol at an auction for twenty dollars."

"Twenty dollars! For that?" Richard's mouth was a thin line. "If the idol belonged to someone else—"

"He gave it away," she said desperately. "He said it was haunted."

Oh, Betsy knew she shouldn't have told Richard that. Flushing, she continued, "It—it's all rather silly and romantic, isn't it, Richard? But intriguing, too. You see, the idol came from a temple in India, and it's supposed to possess mysterious powers. N-naturally I didn't believe such nonsense, but it's a quaint piece of wood carving, and—and—"

Richard wasn't listening. He was looking at the statue, murmuring, "Twenty dollars for a grotesque idol. Sometimes, Betsy, I wonder if you ever will learn

to control your extravagant impulses. It's obvious that you've squandered your money on a worthless bit of bric-a-brac and a romantic story. The only place for this ugly little imp is an ash can. I suggest that you dispose of it as soon as possible."

The Indian idol wasn't mentioned again that evening, but a little of the sparkle was gone from Betsy's eyes and a little of the ready laughter from her lips. When Richard said good night after their date, she walked past the statue without turning her head, but strangely enough there were tears in her eyes.

It was the next day when things really began to happen. It was only little things at first. Incidents like burning the toast, missing her bus, and having her new white hat damped by an unpredicted shower.

Then when Betsy entered her tiny office and hung up her coat, she saw the pink slip. It was lying on her desk with a pile of other papers, but its meaning was unmistakable. These pink slips were only issued to people working for the magazine whose services would be required for only two more weeks!

"Miss Cameron report to Fleming at nine-thirty," the message read briefly, but what it shrieked between its neat, typewritten lines was, "Miss Cameron, you're fired."

Things like this just couldn't be happening to her, Betsy thought bewilderedly after her interview with Miss Fleming, the personnel director for *CHIC* magazine. Nevertheless, the woman's words still rang uncannily in her ears. "The paper shortage, you understand, Miss Cameron. . . . nothing we can control . . . other magazines . . . great need for artists always . . . a pleasure to have had you on our staff, but good-by. Good luck . . ."

Fired, Betsy thought bleakly. Fired from a position that had seemed so secure and promising until—her thoughts jolted to a stop so abruptly that she caught her breath. Until she bought the genie, her mind insisted ominously!

Betsy walked home in a daze. She sat in a chair and stared at the idol. It stared back with its beady little eyes and sinister smile.

"You can't bully me," Betsy heard herself murmur indignantly. "Maybe you could outbluff Mike, but I'm not afraid, you ugly piece of wood!"

AFTER THAT, Betsy tried to ignore the statue. She went job hunting the next day and returned home in the evening feeling tired and out of sorts. She'd had no luck yet finding a position with any of the magazines she'd queried. She climbed the steps to her apartment wearily and stopped halfway up at sight of the landlady waiting at the top.

"If it's about this month's rent—" Betsy started, but paused at the expression on the other woman's face.

"It isn't the rent," the landlady said gently. "It's just that I'm going to need your apartment after next month, Miss Cameron. My son is coming home from overseas with a French bride, and they'll need somewhere to live. A home of their own—"

It was, of course, a polite way of informing her she'd have to give up the apartment. Betsy thought dismally after the landlady had bustled down the stairs again. She knew she could have protested, but she hadn't the heart to interfere with romance. Besides, there were several girls she knew who'd willingly share their apartments.

First the job, then the apartment, she thought uneasily. That left only Richard in her life! She started uncertainly when the telephone rang, but it wasn't Richard calling. It was Mike.

Mike, sounding gay and casual when he said, "How's the haunted house?"

"Very peaceful, thank you," Betsy fibbed grimly, trying to ignore her pounding heart. He had no right to sound so sure of himself, she thought bitterly. It was almost as if he knew nothing had gone right since she bought the Indian idol.

"No weeping, no wailing, no chains clanking in the night?"

"Of course not!" Betsy snapped indignantly. "I told you I didn't believe that silly superstition about the idol. Why, everything's simply wonderful."

There was a pause at the other end of the wire. At last Mike said, very gently, "Then why are you crying, Betsy?"

"Wh—who? Me?" Betsy dabbed hurriedly at her tears.

"You," he said firmly. "Maybe I'd better grab a cab and come over there. If something has gone wrong—"

"I told you everything's fine. Besides, I have a date tonight."

"Your fiancé?"

"Of course. Who else?"

Mike chuckled softly. "My mistake, Betsy. Well—I can wait."

"Wait?" She eyed the telephone suspiciously. "For what?"

Mike's pause was significant. "For your shout," he said at last, and then the receiver clicked gently in Betsy's ear.

That evening Richard arrived right on the dot of eight. He put his hat in its accustomed place on the table. He sat down in his usual chair and eyed the grinning idol disfavorably.

"I see you still have that monstrosity," he said accusingly. "You haven't taken my advice, Betsy."

"I—I've meant to get rid of it," she answered placatingly, "but I've had so much on my mind—" In a burst of confidence, she told Richard about her job and the apartment. When she finished, he looked annoyed.

"I'm not surprised about the position, Betsy. I've told you many times before that an artistic career is never stable. You should do something more worthwhile, more dependable."

"But I like to draw," Betsy objected. "And I'm firmly convinced that magazines are here to stay."

Richard was not amused by her humor. "Something worth-while," he repeated firmly. "I realize that stenography may not seem romantic, but it is always lucrative. As for giving up the apartment"—he looked at her knowingly—"you aren't required to move without satisfactory notice. I'm not in favor of your living here alone, but the principle of the thing—"

"But it's for newlyweds," Betsy murmured apologetically. "They're just coming back to the United States, and they deserve a break. A little home together—" She stopped abruptly, conscious that Richard didn't understand how she felt. With sudden clarity, she knew he'd never understand the way she felt about anything, how spring rain and summer twilight brought a sweet ache to her heart, how thrilled she always was to see what her drawing pencil could create, how hearing children's laughter made her want to cry.

Richard would never understand, she thought in confusion, because he'd never actually known Betsy. He'd never cared for anything except his own rather

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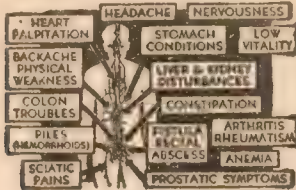
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stodgy thoughts. Betsy eyed him wonderingly, noting that he sat stiffly on the chair, a grim smile on his mouth, a sort of glittering triumph in his eyes. A new thought struck her, and almost before she knew it, Betsy declared, "Why, Richard, you look exactly like the statue!"

That, of course, was the end of her romance with Richard. He left in a huff with Betsy's ring and the parting words that when she came to her senses she could reach him at his club. Betsy said nothing, but there were tears in her eyes, and she felt all mixed up inside. Mike had been right, after all, she decided, when he told her that the idol had the powers for evil. Yesterday she'd had the three things she wanted most in life. Today she had nothing except an apartment that wouldn't be hers much longer and an ugly little idol with a disconcerting grin.

That was when Betsy telephoned Mike. Just hearing his voice had a soothing influence on her wildly surging emotions. "Mike—" she said haltingly, "Mike, I'm shouting for help," and then hung up and cried heartbrokenly.

Mike reached the apartment with incredible speed. One minute he'd been just a voice on the telephone. And then in what seemed like a matter of minutes, he was entering the apartment, big and broad-shouldered and incredibly handsome.

"Hello," he said matter-of-factly. "You look like a lost chord."

"I didn't think my misery was showing," Betsy quipped back pertly, looking at herself in the hall mirror. Actually she felt surprisingly happy, considering that everything had gone wrong, and it seemed to have something to do with his presence.

"It's still early," he said. "Let's go out and drown your sorrows in champagne."

Betsy didn't protest. Things had seemed so unreal all day that dating Mike tonight seemed only a dream-like climax. As soon as they'd been seated in a popular night spot, she told Mike all about her job and her apartment and—lastly—her broken engagement. Mike listened attentively until she'd finished and then nodded his head.

"The genie," he said.

"The genie?"

"Of course—the possessor of evil powers. Don't say I didn't warn you about that nasty little idol. Wasn't everything going okay until you bought it? And what about my broken heart—my shattered life?"

He didn't look very brokenhearted, Betsy thought skeptically. He was grinning down at her, an exciting, disturbing grin that sent thrills down her spine.

"I'm not the superstitious type," Betsy murmured protestingly. "I don't believe in spooks." She'd repeated that over countless times before, but now her protests grew fainter. Before the evening was half over, she'd forgotten all about the idol and all her troubles. She forgot everything because she was having such a wonderful time with Mike that nothing else seemed to matter.

IT WAS terribly late before Mike took Betsy home, and the next night he was back again. He came every night and sometimes at noon for one gloriously exciting week of luncheons, dinners and dancing, or unusual jaunts about town. Once they went to an open air concert. Another time they visited an interesting Italian bakery in Greenwich Village. One night they dined at a Turkish restaurant and ordered Turkish coffee poured thick and fragrant from odd metal pots with fascinatingly long handles.

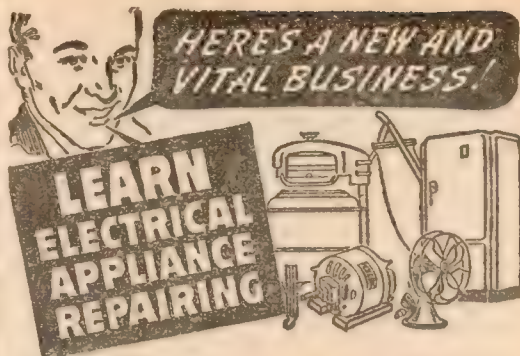
It was after that date that Mike kissed Betsy when he took her home. It was a long, ardent kiss that made Betsy's pulses soar, made her heart catch in her throat, put a husky note in her voice when they finally drew apart.

"You see," Mike whispered softly, "not all the genie's powers are for evil. At heart he's a pretty sentimental guy."

"I don't understand."

Mike held her close. "He brought us together, didn't he? He removed your fiancé from the picture neatly and quickly and paved the way—for this." Mike kissed her again, and Betsy didn't argue. It was heavenly to be in his arms, she decided.

After Mike had said good night, with a promise to pick her up for lunch the next day, Betsy trailed into the apartment wrapped in a dreamy cloud. She even blew the genie a kiss before she tumbled into bed.



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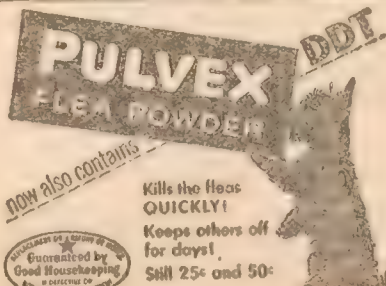


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Betsy slept until late the next morning and wakened rapturously. "Mike—" she murmured his name softly beneath her breath. "Darling Mike—" It didn't matter that they had known each other only a few days. A few hundred years couldn't have made her love him any more than she did right at this moment.

"And to think that you brought us together, genie," she whispered tenderly to the grinning little idol. "I thought that you did only wicked things."

Gently she lifted the statue in her arms, idly wondering what ancient Indian princess had dusted it in the past. She rubbed at its polished surfaces with her dust cloth, then paused, startled. There, carved in the wood in such tiny letters that they were hardly visible to the eye, were the words:

MADE IN U.S.A.

When Mike came for her at noon, Betsy was waiting. She was wearing a tailored silk dress and a bright splash of lipstick, but she moved away when he tried to take her in his arms. She picked up the idol and handed it to him.

"I think this belongs to you," she said too sweetly. "After all, you transported it from faraway India. It has powers for good and evil. It weaves a spell of enchantment over its owners—"

Mike didn't move. His hands dropped to his sides. "You found the inscription," he said quietly.

"Yes, I found the inscription," Betsy's lip curled slightly. "I suppose you have an answer for that, too. Will you claim that some ancient priest had a brain-storm about the future and carved those words there. Or," she said icily, "did I only imagine that it read, 'MADE IN U.S.A.'?"

Mike shrugged wearily. "It's true, Betsy, but believe me, I didn't know it myself for a long time. You see, it did come from Rangoon, believe it or not. A lot of American goods exchanged hands over there. Those peddlers really knew their way around, and some of the fliers took a pretty bad beating financially. I suppose I should have told you the truth right at the start, but I didn't because—"

"Because it amused you to deceive me," Betsy said levelly. "You didn't want the truth to stand in the way of

a romantic story, so you gave me a build-up about the idol being possessed of hypnotic powers and then watched me make a fool of myself." Her voice rose, and she couldn't look at Mike because tears were trembling dangerously near her lashes.

"I actually began to think it was true—that the idol had something to do with my job and my apartment. I thought that meeting you had been fate because the idol willed it that way. Now I know how foolish I was. All the things that have happened were purely accidental, and Richard was right when he said the idol is only an ugly little imp that belongs in an ash can. Richard was right about everything, and I was wrong not to believe him, so now get out!" She opened the door and motioned dramatically. "Get out, Mike, and don't come back. I never want to see you again!"

As soon as he'd gone, Betsy closed the door and turned away. The idol was sitting on a near-by chair still wearing its enigmatical smile. In a burst of fury, Betsy picked it up and leaned out of the window. When she saw Mike on the street below, she called, "You forgot your friend, Mike—" and dropped the statue.

Maybe it was just an accident, or maybe fate had a hand in it somewhere, but Betsy wasn't prepared for what happened after that. As the idol fell, it crashed into a dozen splinters. One of the pieces struck Mike on the head, and he fell to the ground.

For a minute Betsy was paralyzed with horror. Then she went down the stairs in a flash. Someone said, "Mike, darling, darling," and she realized it was her own, stricken voice. She knelt on the sidewalk, cradling his head in her arms and sobbing, "I didn't mean to hurt you. Oh, Mike darling, I couldn't bear it if you're hurt!"

"Couldn't you?" Mike opened his eyes then, grinning into her white, anguished face. "Then why didn't you admit it a few minutes ago and save us all this trouble?"

Betsy started. "You're not hurt! But I thought—"

"Only slightly mutilated," he answered, touching a bump on his head tenderly. "Of course, I'm likely never to be the same unless you devote the rest of your life to me." Mike sat up then and drew

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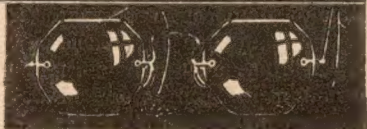
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Betsy into his arms. "You see, I'm in love with you, darling," he said. "I didn't have the heart to tell you the idol was a phoney because I was afraid I might not have an opportunity to see you again if you knew the truth about it. As a matter of fact, I was just as surprised as you were when everything started happening at once—your job, your apartment—your fiancé—"

"But your fiancée, too," Betty reminded him anxiously. "When you sent her the statue, your troubles began."

"Jessica and I would never have gotten along together, honey," he answered soberly. "As soon as I got home, we both began to realize that it was all a mistake. For a while I felt pretty low. I wanted to put the blame somewhere so I pretended that the idol was to blame. Of course, when I met you, I realized my heart wasn't really broken, but I knew I'd have to think fast to keep myself in your picture." He stopped suddenly, aware that there was a dreamy look in her eyes and a soft curve to her red lips.

"Maybe we're both wrong," she whispered wonderingly. "Maybe there was something to the legend after all, even though the idol came from the U.S.A. instead of an Indian temple. At least, if it hadn't broken into a dozen splinters we might not be together now."

Betsy went into Mike's arms then and lifted her lips for his kiss. It might be the end of the idol, she thought blissfully, but it was just the beginning for love. They were two people who weren't ever going to be romance-jinxed again. His kiss was positive proof of that.

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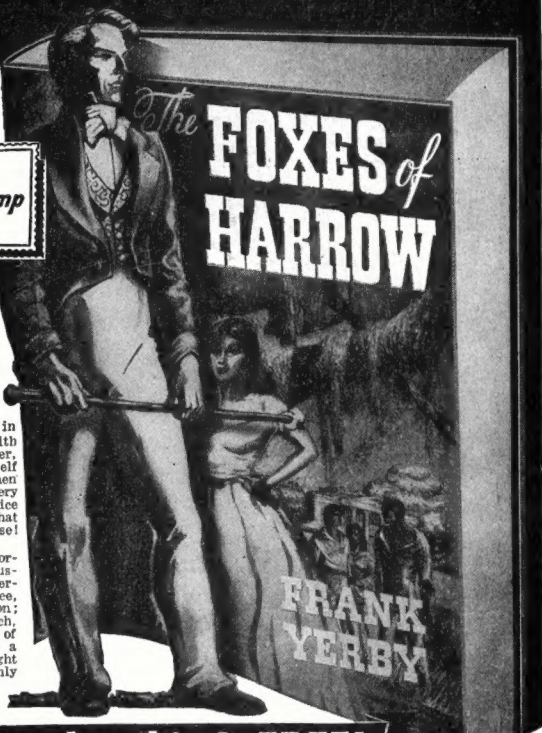
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